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*The Eternal Torment of
Man*

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By
MARC BOEGNER
*Translated from the French by
Morton Scott Enslin*



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Translator's Preface

THE SIX LECTURES WHICH COMPRISE THIS VOLUME were written by a Frenchman for a French audience, yet such is their nature that they should prove equally timely for us in America. The authors M. Boegner quotes so copiously are for the most part his own countrymen, but the problem both they and he are discussing is one that is not bounded by the Pyrenees and the German frontier. Here in America the lively—if somewhat banal—discussion that is going on between those who have been dubbed Humanists and their opponents the Theists has caused a flood of books and articles, very few of which can justly be called other than ephemeral. Of the somewhat boisterous and exuberant productions of the Humanists little need here be said. The most disquieting part of the debate is the apologetic—one could almost call it the timid—attitude of the protagonists for belief in a personal God. Many of them give the impression that every word is being weighed in fear lest the damning epithet “unscientific” be hurled at them. God is espoused, but one is not just certain who the God is.

To all this M. Boegner's treatment is quite different. He is a modern-minded man and is heartily

in sympathy with modern thought, but he is profoundly convinced that life without God, the God of whom Jesus Christ was the most adequate revelation, is fruitless and vain, and he is not afraid to say so. His beauty of diction and forcefulness of expression are happy instruments for the true and glowing piety that shines through every page. The reader may not agree with every statement, but he can hardly escape the feeling that the French minister is earnestly striving to set forth truths which for him at least are no longer debatable—they are but a part of that revelation which God is ever making of himself.

Since the volume is a series of lectures, the conversational style is everywhere apparent, and has been preserved in this translation. The lectures are copiously documented. I have sought to make these references useful to English readers. Where the volumes referred to have been already translated into English the quotations for the most part have been given in the form in which they stand in the several English translations, with references in the notes to both the French and the English. French editions of writers, notably Pascal, which would probably not be available to the average American reader have been disregarded since the passages will be available in any standard English edition. In one or two instances more recent editions of the works

of English scholars have been substituted for those referred to in the French. The biblical quotations are for the most part given in the rendering of the American Revised version, except for the substitution of "the Eternal" for "Jehovah" to conform to French usage.

I sincerely hope that in the transfer of these lectures into English the captivating and compelling note, so clearly marked in the original, may not have been entirely lost.

M. S. E.

DENNIS PORT, MASSACHUSETTS

June 23, 1931.

Preface

WHEN LAST YEAR I INDICATED IN A BRIEF INTRODUCTION the motives which had determined me to give a series of lectures on Christianity and the modern world I expressed my intention of continuing the task of which those lectures could be only the start. Through the six studies which the present volume contains, delivered during the past weeks, I sought to place before the minds of my listeners one of the fundamental problems which I could only touch on last year and to indicate by what method and in what direction its solution is to be sought by those who approach it, not in a spirit of superficial curiosity, but with the ardent desire of discovery.

I am under no illusion, as may readily be believed, as to the omissions and defects of a study which, in the circumstances in which it was presented, could not endeavor to be complete. Such as it is, perhaps it will be able to aid some believers to a better understanding of some of the difficulties which unbelievers encounter on the road to faith. Perhaps also some unbelievers will be led to discover, not indeed presented artificially in the abstract but presenting itself in their very selves, in the reality of life's ex-

periences, the fundamental problem of their life and of their destiny. Such a result, trifling as it may be in the eyes of the world, would be sufficient, it seems to me, to justify my purpose.

It is fitting that at the beginning of this volume I express my gratitude to Pastor Caudron, directeur des éditions "Je sers," who indeed does serve with such effective devotion the spread of Protestant thought. In the attempt of evangelization which the Passy lectures represent, he has been, he is, too valuable a collaborator for me ever to forget my obligation to him.

M. B.

March 24, 1929.

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I

The Torment of God

LAST YEAR WHILE STUDYING THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS of the conflict which brings Christianity and the modern world to grips¹ we found ourselves in the presence of an anguish of souls in which many observers discover in the last analysis a religious significance. "All questions," writes Marcel Arland in a phrase to which I am indebted for the subject of this year's meetings—"all questions revert to a unique problem, that of God; God, the eternal torment of men, whether they strive to create him or destroy him."²

Does such an assertion rest on illusion or is it grounded in the reality of life? Can we say that there has been at all times, that there is today, in mankind an absorbing concern about God, a need of God amounting to torment? If this is so, how does this torment manifest itself? Do those men who have experienced him, or who are now experi-

¹ *Le Christianisme et le monde moderne*, Paris, Fischbacher.

² "Sur un nouveau mal du siècle," *Nouvelle Revue française*, February 1, 1924.

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encing him, find any relief? What remedy does Christianity hold out to them?

Such are the questions we are to consider today. Need I say that with regard to your convictions, however different they may be from my own, I shall strive to display a real sympathy for troubled souls, for minds which seek and often suffer because they do not find? For your part, gentlemen, do not withhold your assistance in a task which demands of you, as well as of me, if it is to bear fruit, the persistent will to understand, a real determination to open the mind and heart, and give me the sort of attention which Malebranche called an innate prayer of the soul for truth.

I

Is it legitimate to speak of a torment of God when round about us multitudes of human beings live, or at least appear to live, without the slightest concern about God?

Frivolity on the part of some, exacting demands of business for others, wearing anxiety about existence—these appear to eliminate from the lives of a vast number of men all need, more than that, all thought of God.

Thought of this sort, moreover, declare some who are engaged in intellectual pursuits is completely alien to them.

One scholar, who by his writings waged a vigorous campaign of propaganda in favor of atheism at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, wrote, "As far back as my recollections go, I do not find a trace of the idea of God."³

More recently you may have read these words from the pen of one who some years since with a flair for writing which cannot be denied made a study of the problem of the origins of Christianity: "God, by whom we have been wont to represent the absolute, is the invention of an age and of a people. His vogue in comparison with what it was in bygone centuries has become decidedly less. . . . God is on the wane."⁴ About the same time an historian of religions, in answer to the question what he knew about God, remarked that "in the language of every day as in both religious and secular history the word God remains by right of survival, but implies only the long history of our illusions and our pride."⁵

If it is only a question of survival, better would it be to get rid of it. Yet such was not the view of Voltaire, exclaiming, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him," and who, in his quest

³ Le Dantec, *L'Athéisme*, p. 10.

⁴ Couchoud, "Adieu au christianisme," in *La Renaissance religieuse*, Paris, 1928, p. 141.

⁵ S. Reinach, *Ce qui je sais de Dieu*, Paris, 1926, p. 141.

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for an explanation of life which would satisfy his intelligence, confessed:

The universe embarrasses me. I cannot make myself content
That though this watch exists the watchmaker is absent.

But more than this, it was not that Voltaire felt that some belief in God was of value simply to explain the origin of the world, but because "in ethics it is far preferable to allow a God than to make no such admission."⁶ From such an affirmation modern disciples of Voltaire recoil.

Listen to Renan: "It may well be that the voices from within proceed from honest illusions, preserved through custom, and that the world is but a diverting fairyland for which no god takes thought. So then we must contrive that in the two hypotheses we shall not have been completely wrong. We must give ear to the voices from above, but in such a way that should the latter hypothesis be correct we should not be too much deceived. . . . We owe virtue to the Eternal, but we have the right to add to it, as a sort of personal reprisal, irony. In that way we repay quite fairly jest for jest, we play the trick that has been played on us."⁷

It is the same sort of irony which one of our contemporary critics reveals in a sentence which he renders "without appeal": "Between friends who

⁶ *Dictionnaire philosophique*, art. "Athéisme."

⁷ *Feuilles détachées*, pp. 394-398.

are free from prejudice God remains a subject of most delightful jest."⁸

Let us pay heed none the less! Are we sure that back of these verbal poses, these intellectual attitudes, this absence of prejudice which every now and then parades itself so noisily, there is not a feeling of uneasiness, at least of unrest?

There is a mystery of souls into which we can but rarely penetrate, a mystery which Baudelaire described in the words:

. . . One must shroud himself in mystery,
Must shut his eyes to things about and, free alike from
haughtiness and spleen,
Without saying to his fellows, "I love but heaven only,"
Must say to God, "Give my soul surcease from the earth."⁹

Yes, there is a mystery of souls where they are working out now and again unnumbered real and mighty changes which make possible within them the hatching of something which as yet they have not foreseen.

When he who today is known as Father Leseur was living with Elisabeth Leseur, whom he said himself he neither understood nor sensed her ascent toward the mountain peaks of the spiritual life, did he know that one day within himself there would

⁸ Paul Souday, *Ce qui je sais de Dieu*, p. 161.

⁹ *Recueillement*.

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take place a complete cataclysm, through which his soul and thought, which he believed firmly rooted in an unbelief touched with irony, would open wide to the conviction of the reality of God and to the Christian faith?

And was it not only yesterday, gentlemen, that we read in a political journal this farewell statement, dictated to the editor-in-chief of that journal by a publicist and journalist, whose thought and writings appeared impregnated with the teachings of Voltaire, Ernest Vaughan:

You know that since childhood and through my whole life I have sneered at religions as well as at the one in which I was born, in which you too, a native of Brittany, were born. All my republican generation sneered with me. Well, now when I am about to disappear, without fear and so far as is possible without reproach, I declare . . . that I have been greatly deceived. . . . Today I am sure, absolutely sure, that it is impossible to establish a civilized society on materialism and atheism. The religious explanation of the mysteries which enshroud us is obviously not clear to our poor human reason; but the materialistic and mechanistic explanation of the free thinkers and the atheists is still less clear. . . . I am anxious to say to you that I am dying in full agreement with you; had I discovered sooner these truths, I would have propagated them as do you without fear of what any one might say, without fear of ridicule, without fear of sarcasm.¹⁰

¹⁰ *La Victoire*, January 23, 1929.

How many believers today, unbelievers yesterday, remember with pain times when they too, indifferent then to the realities of the spiritual life, kept company with negations and irony?

Yet let us not ignore reactions of a very different nature of the human mind in the presence of an infinitely complex reality.

Auguste Comte distinguished long since two groups of minds, those who *need God* and those who reveal a need no less profound to get rid of God.¹¹

Whatever may be the consequence in the attitude, of an ebbing or atrophy of the religious sense as far as believers are concerned, it is no less true that this need of the absence of God exists. We verify it in the man whom we meet on our own street; at times he even assumes a distinctly hostile attitude toward all affirmation of God. But in this belligerent attitude itself can not we discern one form of this very obsession about God?

Gentlemen, among those who enter the lists by the side of men who indisputably are striving through a propaganda, subtle or violent, to root out of men's conscience faith in a God who gives to human life its law and purpose, there are some who without always being aware of it are fighting under

¹¹ Cf. Guy-Grande, *La Renaissance religieuse*, p. 261.

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the name of God some special notion, some special representation of God.

There is nothing more touching for believers than to find themselves in the company of men who through loyalty to what appears to them as sovereign truth are battling every affirmation of God.

Recall Michelet, who did not hesitate to say that he was waging war against the gods because he expected to serve the God of the future. He desired a God commensurate with man's desire, a God who should be the God of all men, and he considered Christianity unable to teach this generous God: "The gods," he cried, "are what bars God."¹²

Above all think of Nietzsche, the philosopher whose influence upon the men of my generation was so profound. Did he not proclaim in all his works that the "Death of God" is the most important event in the history of humanity? In his *Joyful Wisdom* he gives expression to this idea with tragic beauty which will not escape you.

Listen to these words of the madman who, according to Nietzsche, rushes about in broad daylight with a lighted lantern in his hand in search of God:

"Where has God gone?" he shouted. "I will tell you! We have slain him, you and I! All of us, we are his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink the ocean dry? Who gave us the sponge with which

¹² Cf. Guéhenno, *L'Évangile éternel*, Paris, 1927, pp. 111, 116, 121.

we have wiped out the whole horizon? What have we done in detaching this earth from its sun? Where does it go now? Where are we going? Far from all the suns? Are we not even now dropping in uninterrupted fall? Back, sideways, ahead, in every direction? Is there still up and down? Are we not wandering across an infinite nothingness? Do we not feel the breath of the empty limitless space? Is it not colder? Is not the night growing constantly blacker? Must we not light our lanterns at high noon? Do you not hear even now the noise of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do you not detect even now the stench of God's decay?—for even gods decay! God is dead! God will stay dead! And we have slain him! How shall we console ourselves, we who are the chief of murderers? What the world held most sacred, most powerful, bled beneath our knives,—who will cleanse us from the stain of this blood? With what water shall we purify ourselves? What expiatory feasts, what holy games must we devise? Is not the greatness of this act too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods, were it only to appear worthy of having done it?"¹³

"It is evident," Nietzsche continues, "what in reality conquered the Christian God; it was Christian morality itself, the idea of sincerity employed with ever increasing severity; it is the Christian conscience sharpened in the confessional and which has been transformed, sublimated to become the

¹³ *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Bk. III, § 125. [The author cites this passage and the two shorter quotations on the following page from Henri Lichtenberger's *Philosophie de Nietzsche*, Paris, 1900, pp. 20 ff.—TRANSLATOR.]

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scientific conscience, intellectual 'niceness' sought at any price."¹⁴

And yet after he had become an atheist on account of religion, Nietzsche seemed obsessed all his life by a single problem: "What is the meaning of life for man, what is its meaning for *me*, granting that there is no God?"¹⁵

Of a truth, is not God the torment of men when they destroy him?

II

But he is also the torment of men when they seek him!

Oh, this thirst for God in many unbelievers and most common in the man who suffers a distress for which he finds no relief!

Along all the roads traveled by the human caravan we can meet by broken cisterns, powerless to quench their thirst, those souls in rags and bleeding of whom S. Augustine speaks.¹⁶

That this aspiration at times remains ignorant for long seasons of what it is groping for all of us know full well. Many are the names which those who experience it give it.

For some it is the homesick longing for life; their suffering results from being jostled about by the in-

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, Bk. III, § 357.

¹⁵ Lichtenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Confessions*, translation by Gougoud, Paris, Crès, p. 105.

cessant restraints, within them and without, by which their aspiration for life and for infinite life is murdered; a suffering which in certain souls, becoming more and more acute, issues in the need of nothingness. Thus they know this metaphysical anguish, so undeniably acute, which makes them long from the depths of their souls for nothingness. And that is the hell of ultimate torment which characterizes so strikingly a host of our contemporaries.

With others it is the aspiration after truth, after happiness, a longing of which Pascal noted the cruel deceptions: "We desire truth, and we find within ourselves only uncertainty. We seek happiness, and we find only misery, only death. We are incapable of not desiring truth and happiness, and are incapable of either certainty or happiness."¹⁷

With others it will be the ceaseless aspiration after justice which always seems to steal away at the embrace of the pilgrims of earth.

With others it is the acute feeling of a *lack*, of a chasm which is dug in their life, perhaps after the collapse of their former beliefs, or yet again the aspiration toward a life which will not be constantly curbed, maimed as its life expands. "We never live," said Pascal once again, "but we hope to live."¹⁸

¹⁷ *Thoughts*, § 437.

¹⁸ *Thoughts*, § 172.

they are seen to be, contain the proof (although it would be but their infinite increase!) of his taste for the infinite; only it is a taste which is constantly going astray."²⁰

Surely he sensed a splendid certainty when, speaking of human beings who hard pressed by the need of something absolute fall below the brutes, he said,

In the dozing brute an angel wakes.²¹

A touching phrase echoing that of the ancient chorus which may be applied not alone to Cassandra, but to all mankind:

Even in the soul of slave remains the breath divine.²²

Have you ever had the occasion to read the account given by Tolstoy of the hours of anguish which preceded his conversion to Christianity?

I felt, says Tolstoy, that something had broken within me on which my life had always rested, that I had nothing left to hold on to, and that morally my life had stopped. . . . What will be the outcome of what I do today? Of what shall I do tomorrow? What will be the outcome of all my life? Why should I live? Why should I do anything? Is there in life any purpose which the inevitable death which awaits me does not undo and destroy? . . .

²⁰ Introduction to *Poème de Laschish*.

²¹ *L'aube spirituelle*.

²² Æschylus, *Agamemnon* 1051.

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These questions are the simplest in the world. From the stupid child to the wisest old man, they are in the soul of every human being. Without an answer to them, it is impossible, as I experienced, for life to go on. . . . During the whole course of this year . . . my heart kept languishing with another pining emotion. I can call this by no other name than that of a thirst for God.²³

Perhaps you are familiar with the moving words in which Sully-Prudhomme at the end of his study, *True Religion according to Pascal*, expressed the torment of his entire life, the torment of his intellect as with anguish it sought for truth, the torment of his mind as it sought for truth and failed to find it here below. "For us," he concluded, "having battered our heads in vain against a narrowly circumscribed horizon, made fast by walls we can not scale, humbly we await with a sigh the answer of the tomb to our anxious question."²⁴

And so, perchance in men's thought or in their conscience or in their heart, everywhere and in every age of human history we discern the echoes of this inner torment; and it appears to me that this infinite anguish of the human soul finds expression in the word of one of our contemporaries who has suffered from it more than many others: "My soul

²³ Quoted by William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 153-156.

²⁴ *La vraie religion selon Pascal*, p. 388.

is sad, and a thirst I do not understand consumes it."²⁵

Recently, gentlemen, attention was directed to the very low place God occupied in the literature of the end of the nineteenth century.²⁶ What a change since then! Everywhere about us today we are detecting the echo of a deep-seated uneasiness which is troubling men's souls, and we assent to the utterance of a contemporary thinker: "More than ever God is occupying first place in the thinking of our youths."²⁷

Perhaps you will say, "Unquestionably it is the war which is the real cause of this change; the war which revealed beyond gainsaying the fragility of a civilization which we had believed so substantial; the war which brought millions and millions of men for four years and more face to face with the possibility of speedy death!"

That the war precipitated this change, and augmented it, I concede. But it is no less certain that this transformation of spirit had begun long before the war.

A Péguy, a Psichari, a Jacques Rivière, before the war had experienced the uneasiness which they passed on to many souls. Of those just mentioned

²⁵ Lamendé, *Les Enfants du siècle*, Paris, 1926, p. 216.

²⁶ Daniel-Rops, *Notre inquiétude*, Paris, 1927, p. 266.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Jacques Rivière is undoubtedly the best example of the torment experienced by youths of twenty.

You recollect having read in his correspondence with Claudel those words by which he introduces himself to the one from whom he hopes for help:

Here I am: twenty years old; like every one else. I'm not happy nor have I any especial misfortune; but an unrest, awful unrest which has been with me all my life and keeps me continually stirred up, and continually prevents my finding any satisfaction; an unrest which stirs me into transports of pleasure, into transports of despair, an absolutely tireless unrest. . . . I know that God aids you and that you live in God. . . . That's why I've determined to ask you for peace.

Peace. Oh, this God, this God, would that I could feel him by, right there, very close, solid, really true so that I might no longer search for him, muse about happiness. . . . Peace! Give me peace, the real answer, peace.²⁸

From then on, you remember, we see him caught in the dilemma of enthusiasm and recoil. He knows his soul is wretched and in anguish; the torment which is torturing him appears horrible to him, and yet he asks that patience be shown. He refuses to prefer God to himself, and confesses that his pride appear to him of a sudden as the cause of a deep-seated incompatibility between himself and God. Then he retracts; once more he seeks the answer to his torment, and we see him little by little orienting

²⁸ Jacques Rivière et Paul Claudel, *Correspondance*, Paris, 1926, pp. 2, 5.

his aspiration to the God in whom from then on and for some years at least²⁹ he will find relief.

Other souls nearer our own in point of time reveal to our ears the same note. Such is Marcel Arland, who wrote one day:

In exchange for a modicum of certainty I would gladly give the fairest promises that life holds out, even life itself. But if outside I seek for calm, I am offered sleep; if I seek it within myself, I find only ceaseless aspirations. Can I but find escape from this uneasiness within, I shall not hesitate. But for some the inability to deceive themselves is at once their torment and their relief. I have no hope of ever tasting any relief from this uneasiness, for too well I know that it is the very essence of my life, and that it is found in every man, although each one may use every effort to smother it.³⁰

And did he not offer at the same time this advice to those who share with him the same unrest:

You are seeking for some purpose, a reason for life, something sure. All your beliefs have vanished. Why should I go in this direction rather than in that? you think; and you would also say, were you not restrained by a certain cowardice or by some hope still remaining, Why life rather than death? Be honest. One thing alone could bring you certainty—I do not say relief—a miracle. You would that

²⁹ Let me make clear that these words of mine make no claim to solve the delicate question which is raised by the intellectual and moral attitude of Rivière during the years preceding his death. Here let us have respect for the mystery of the soul.

³⁰ *Etapas*, p. 56.

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God would suddenly appear to you, and would himself enjoin his law in supernatural letters. Ah, for such a miracle as this what would you not give and how joyously would you not give it! After such a miracle how much more comfortable you would find it to live, how much easier still to die! I have watched for it in vain amid my fellow men, and far from them. Why should I hide it from you?—I have never ceased from waiting for it!³¹

Another such is René Schwob; born a Jew, but broken loose from every creed, who spread before us a few months ago, perhaps with unnecessary venom, the story of his conversion. At first he shrank from the necessity of choosing, asking himself if he might not remain in a tragic sort of indecision, without deciding between self and God.

But later he laid bare deep within himself a passion that could not be denied—the passion for discovering truth, its oneness, and the thirst for God. “This great mysterious anxiety which is consuming so many today,” he observes, “is the anxiety within their own soul, writhing in its chains and whose groans torment them.”³²

Perhaps you will retort: “An exceptional case! You have selected a few *littérateurs* to show us the evidence of their torment or anxiety!” By no means, gentlemen. We need only to look closely at the souls in the most different strata of modern society to dis-

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³² René Schwob, *Moi Juif*, Paris, 1928, pp. 48, 96, 212.

cover again this same suffering and the signs of the same distress.

Here, for example, is this man of affairs of whom René Schwob speaks. Enchained to his profession he experiences intense suffering because he is not able to devote himself to that inner tormenting commotion—the unrest of God.³³

And even now as I am speaking there is this host of souls, of youths and of men and women already well along on life's path, living in your very midst, who have hitherto let themselves be enamored of the visible. But as a result of shifting their gaze and looking within themselves, they are discovering unexpectedly this aspiration, this torment which is the torment of God.

How sound is the diagnosis which a contemporary observer offers: "At bottom we are inconsolable mystics. Only pride and a sort of surface hardness prevents our admitting it. To be sure, the confusion of the world is to a large extent the result of our unrest. Yet no less is it the result of the absence of God. . . . Something is always lacking to our heart."³⁴

III

Are unbelievers the only ones who experience the torment of which we have just been speaking? Such

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁴ D. Guérin, *Revue hebdomadaire*, July 25, 1925.

an opinion would be quite mistaken. Many are the believers who feel it after their attainment of faith.

"What?" many will exclaim. "Does a soul still experience the torment of God after its birth to the life of faith? If that is the case, of what use is faith?"

I do not deny that we see in the various Christian communions some who profess—and rightly too—that they are Christians who give us the impression that they are experiencing perpetual peace. But do not believe that that is the unvarying condition of those who have met the God of Jesus Christ on their path, or rather in the depths of their own soul, and who wish to yield themselves more and more completely to the action of his grace.

Undoubtedly the aspiration, the agony, and the torment which believers experience are quite different from those which unbelievers feel. They imply, at least to a certain degree and occasionally in an increasing degree, the possession of God. They are not incompatible with the soul's peace. This torment of God is no less real, and in every stage of the religious history of humanity we perceive its echo.

Recall the words of the Psalmist:

O God, thou art my God; earnestly will I seek thee:
My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee,
In a dry and weary land, where no water is.³⁵

³⁵ Psalm 63:1.

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
So panteth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul panteth for God, for the living God.³⁶

Let us pass down the centuries. . . . Do you not seem to recognize a trace of this same thirst for God which the Psalmist expressed, in these words written but yesterday:

My God, what is this desolation in which now you are causing me to languish? God, this is not life, this existence which without you I am leading. From the depths of my distress, with all the pitiful humility of a heart confessing that without you it can do nothing, Lord, I beg you, do not leave me longer in this utter destitution. You know full well that I am no longer very strong. What will I become if you do not sustain me? I falter and hesitate. O God, leave me alone no longer. My faith in you is not yet strong enough; my soul still too frail for you to leave it to its own weak devices. O God, I beg that you will let fall a few more seeds into this parched ground. . . . Its barrenness appals me. I am no longer now as I was in former days when I was unacquainted with your joy; no, O God, I can return no more to my parched and barren dryness.³⁷

This is the disquiet which those who have just been born to the life of faith so often experience. But there is another anguish which at times stirs their soul to its very depths; the anguish of finding oneself in an adventure and unable to discover to

³⁶ Psalm 42:1 f.

³⁷ René Schwob, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

what it will lead. It is the torment of the man who having sought God has found him, and who suddenly realizes that this God with whom he is aspiring to live is forcing him along paths in which he encounters great fear.

Listen to Jacques Rivière, when he had become a Christian:

Christianity spreads like a conflagration, like gangrene in a limb. Astonishing the swiftness with which it grows in the soul and constantly reappearing always further on lays hold of and bears away new forces which it makes its prey. I realize well the fear which it inspires and that for a soul at all logically inclined it may well appear a dreadful thing to come in contact with.³⁸

And Rivière himself experienced this fear, as other words of his make plain:

O the fear of this dreadful bondage to all sorts of demands into which one falls as soon as he yields himself to God. I am afraid that the patience which I have been able to display in the ills in which God has involved me hitherto does not lead me to involve myself in new ones still more dreadful. I tremble at the thought of falling into this deep and endless distress into which God is wont to plunge and keep those who give themselves to him. I am not made for that. I am too well, too much in step with life. God, take from me the temptation for sainthood. This is not my task. Be content with a life of purity and self control, which I shall strive with all my might to realize for you. Do not deprive me of those wondrous joys which I have known, which

³⁸ *A la trace de Dieu*, August 14, 1916.

I have loved so much, which I aspire so much to find again. Do not confound. I am not the sort that must. . . . Do not tempt me with the impossible.³⁹

And then there is the torment which some believers experience, be they heathen with beliefs which seem to us so poverty struck or those with a faith which makes its affirmation in some one of the Christian confessions. Regardless of their views they all reveal the anguish which results from a separation of the believer and his God. Let us consider a few examples.

The heathen, of whom we often speak much but know little, experience this torment of separation from God. The missionary Rusillon, who has made a most useful study of the Negroes, shows in a recent book on heathenism that they understand what separates them from God. They themselves are to blame. Their legends say so without evasion. "Even today the heathen soul accuses itself all through its stories, legends, and proverbs. If it is separated from God as a result of its own voluntary act, it has seriously offended him. The responsibility for the rupture reverts to man, and he has never discovered the way to bring God back. In consequence he has deep in his heart a profound homesick longing."⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.*, October 5, 1915.

⁴⁰ H. Rusillon, *Le Paganisme*, Paris, 1928, p. 35.

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There is the same sense of disquiet in the Psalms of Israel:

. . . I said in my prosperity,
I shall never be moved.

Thou, Eternal, of thy favor hadst made my mountain to
stand strong:

Thou didst hide thy face; I was troubled.⁴¹

From the Psalmist, revealing his disquiet to God many centuries before Christ, let us turn to the sixteenth century and take up the cry of distress of a Luther. He too, while in the Erfurt monastery, experienced the torment of God. And yet was he not convinced of the firmness of his faith?

"To the world," he tells us, "my life made a fine display, but not at all to me. I had a broken spirit. I was always sad. All the consolation I received from my righteousness and my works were powerless. . . . I used to go up to the altar in despair; in despair I would come back from it. I did penance, but the sense of despair did not leave me."⁴²

Now that I have brought the testimony of the soul of the heathen, of Israel, and of a great reformer, will you allow me to let you hear also the echo of the disquiet one of the present writers in France today is suffering? He is one of those of whom it may be said that if he knows the manifold appeals of a soul to Satan he experiences as well the

⁴¹ Psalm 30:6 f.

⁴² Quoted from Kahn, *Luther*, vol. i, p. 58.

manifold appeals of a soul to God. Of his attempts at religious meditation he wrote one day:

Left my lectures and those pious exercises which my heart, completely hard and distraught, no longer approved. Seeing there no more than comedy and dishonest comedy at that in which I was convinced I detected the demon's game. See what the demon is whispering to my heart. Lord, do not let him have the last word. . . . Do not let the devil take your place in my heart. Lord, do not let yourself be dispossessed. If you withdraw yourself completely, he will take possession. Do not utterly confound me with him! Remember that once I was able to love you!⁴³

Gentlemen, believers know still other grounds for disquiet and torment. At times it actually seems that in the word of Job "the terrors of God do set themselves in array" against them.⁴⁴ They watch the spectacle of nature, and if, as is no doubt the case, for some "the heavens declare the glory of God," for others, on the contrary, nature with its awful law of struggle for existence is a stumbling block for thought and faith. They see sufferings which nothing seems able to justify. They are witnesses of crying injustices, and the God in whom they believe seems to will them or at least allow them. They are caught by the torment of real dilemmas, and their conscience or their thought, which can not free itself from their embrace struggles in vain. They see the

⁴³ André Gide, *Numquid et tu?* pp. 58, 61.

⁴⁴ Job 6:4.

inconsistencies by which they appear to be cornered in their effort to prevent their Christian life from being gnawed away by the needs of life in the world, in their effort to bring about a real connection between the supernatural and the natural life, a task which all of us find extremely difficult to accomplish. And their torment has found expression through the whole course of the religious history of mankind in words which rouse in our hearts deep and mournful echoes.

Charles Péguy was right when he wrote to his friend Lotte, like himself new born to the life of faith: "Catholics are truly insufferable in their mystical security. They fancy that the Christian's natural state is peace—peace through the intellect, peace in the intellect. On the contrary, the real characteristic of the mystic is an unconquerable unrest. If they believe that the saints were tranquil gentlemen, they fool themselves."⁴⁵

This torment of God, traces of which we have noted in men's souls, assumes at times a collective aspect. Thus in the third century "in the heavy atmosphere of a period of oppression and impotence" all those who had not found an answer to the anguish of their heart in the official cults of Greece

⁴⁵ Quoted by Jerome et Jean Theraud, *Notre Cher Péguy*, vol. ii, p. 126.

and Rome flew, as it were, to the mystery religions of redemption and communion with the divinity.⁴⁶

In later years there came the great religious revivals which mark decision moments of spiritual growth in the history of Christianity. For example, in the England of the eighteenth century in the days of Wesley and in our churches of France at the beginning of the nineteenth century this revival of the religious sense made its presence felt in many groups. I must content myself with this brief comment.

Indeed, at the end of this first study do we not hear all mankind crying with the poet, "Lord, I am nothing, but thy thirst consumes me?"⁴⁷

Such is the torment of God in the human soul. Its true significance will not appear to us until later. But, from now on, it seems to me, you should understand the far reaching significance of the word which I quoted at the outset: "God is the eternal torment of man."

Once more let me repeat, I know full well that there are numberless folk who do not experience it. But do the examples I have cited give you the right to assert that they will never experience it?

And you who are listening to me today, unbe-

⁴⁶ Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, 1907, p. 67 [E. T., p. 43].

⁴⁷ Lamartine, *L'Hymne de la nuit*.

lievers firmly entrenched in your negations or Christians comfortably established in a tranquil faith—how do you know but what suddenly beneath this dead calm of thought and soul which you think is assured to you forever there will not come a mighty tidal wave to sweep away the frail skiff of your convictions and to stir up an anguish with which from then on you will be forced to live?

Ah, let me hope that you may know how then to give to this anguish its real name, and that without groping uncertainly you may recognize in it the torment which from the dawn of its history has driven mankind on along the paths of God!

II

Across the World of the Gods

YOU HAVE DOUBTLESSLY FELT AS IF YOU WERE A bit deafened by the many voices I have let you hear as the numerous echoes of the torment of God in the human soul were gathered together.

Yet was not the very fact that they were many and of very diverse origin necessary to make their agreement the more striking?

In every age men of every race have found, or believed that they had found, in their belief in a God or gods a relief from this torment. Later we shall meet the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ. Let us see today if by a survey of the world of the gods which mankind, save for Judaism and Christianity, has worshiped we can cast any light on the profound significance of the torment of God.

I

When a man says God he says religion; but when he says religion does he always say God? The question is well put. Without mentioning the custom of talking about the religion of Progress or the religion

of Science or the religion of Humanity, which has crept into speech, it is to be observed that religions exist in which the idea of gods is absent, or at least appears to play a very secondary rôle. Such is the case with Buddhism which one historian, Oldenberg, tells us is a "religion without a god," and which another, Barth, considers "absolutely atheistic."¹

Furthermore, is atheism always irreligious? In their attempt to prove the contrary many thinkers lay stress on some singularly moving examples. Others are quite ready to believe that as the human mind frees itself more and more from the myths and legends with which it has lived in times past—and in large measure still lives—it will some day find the crowning achievement of its life in a religion without a god.

"The idea of a single god," a contemporary author writes, "has become so natural to us that we believe it essential to religion. It isn't. . . . An atheistic religion is quite conceivable."²

This is sufficient, gentlemen, to indicate the extreme difficulty presented by every definition of religion, however loose it may be. Does the etymology of the word give us any light? Does religion

¹ For these estimates as well as others, see Durkheim *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, p. 42 [E. T., p. 30].

² Couchoud, *La Renaissance religieuse*, p. 140.

come from *religare*, which means to bind, and which, accordingly, appears to imply the existence of a relation, indispensable in every religion, between man and one or more powers upon which he feels himself dependent? Or, on the contrary, does religion come from *relegere*, as some scholars maintain? And does this latter word suggest rather the idea of vigilant observances? I do not hesitate to consider the first etymology very probable, but I recognize that philologists are by no means agreed.

A new science is now making its appearance, which in spite of its recent origin has already undergone a considerable development—the science of religions or the history of religions. Let us not hesitate to make perfectly clear that it has rendered until now immense service. It has demonstrated, and by its own development it is constantly making the demonstration more complete, that it is an essential characteristic of man to be religious.

Furthermore, it reveals that the complex religions whose birth and growth it studies are as it were species of the same genus.

But then what is religion? Is it possible by the study of religions which differ most widely from each other to isolate in each certain characteristics which, since they occur in all the others, would constitute to a certain extent the constant elements of what for men we call religion?

And to discover these primordial elements of all the religions in such a way that they may be included in a definition of religion is precisely what the historians of religion are striving to do.

Let us look at a few of their definitions:

"The religious feeling," one says, "is the feeling of dependence in relation to the wills which primitive man places in the universe."³

Salomon Reinach defines religion as "an ensemble of scruples which hinder the free exercise of our faculties."⁴

For Morris Jastrow, "Religion consists of three elements: (1) the natural recognition of a Power or Powers beyond our control; (2) the feeling of dependence upon this Power or Powers; (3) entering into relations with this Power or Powers.

"Uniting these elements into a single proposition, religion may be defined as the natural belief in a Power or Powers beyond our control, and upon whom we feel ourselves dependent; which belief and feeling of dependence prompt (1) to organisation, (2) to specific acts, (3) to the regulation of conduct, with a view to establishing favorable relations between ourselves and the Power or Powers in question."⁵

³ Marie-Jean Guyau, quoted in *Orpheus*, p. 3.

⁴ S. Reinach, *Orpheus*, Paris, 1909, p. 4.

⁵ *The Study of Religion*, New York, 1911, pp. 171 f.

Finally Durkheim writes, "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them."⁶

Let us observe, however, that the history of religions presents many uncertainties and many differences of opinion. To tell the truth, it offers some difficulties all its own. "In matters which have to do with documents, statements of facts, and references which serve as the foundation for the science of religions, no other subject is so open to the 'pretty near,' the hypothetical, and the arbitrary."

Its task, I need hardly remind you, is "to know the loftiest thoughts, the most intimate sentiments of men removed from us by thousands of miles in space, by centuries in time,"⁷ and above all by hereditary customs, by ways of thought, and by modes of expressing their thought totally different from our own. When, more particularly, uncivilized peoples are the subject of inquiry, all the historians of religions and all the sociologists concur in admitting that we make them say about what we desire, so great is their own inability to express themselves.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 65 [E. T., p. 47].

⁷ Léonce de Grandmaison in *Christus—Manuel d'histoire des religions*, Paris, 1916, p. 24.

Then we are confronted with imposing reconstructions which reveal, according to this scholar or that, the way religion has developed in the human race and how the potentialities which the original germs contained have become actual in very different forms.

But however impressive these reconstructions may be they usually give the impression of being hypothetical and, more than that, mutually irreconcilable.

And what a difference of opinion there is in deciding which is the fundamental religious element! It is proposed indeed to get to the very bottom, to seek to isolate in man's religious experience that poor emotion, scarcely more than animal, which would be *religion*.⁸ But what is found at the source? Some, like Tiele, insist it is the notion of spirits; others, like Frazer, give first place to magic; still others, like Robertson Smith, totems; others, like Durkheim, the social instinct and taboos. What am I to conclude? In fact is it not evident that, when it is a question of classifying documents as ticklish as those which the history of religions sets before scholars, just as soon as it is desired to decide between them, to establish a hierarchy, it is necessary to have taken already a philosophic attitude which determines in advance the general interpretation of the conclusions

⁸ *Christus*, pp. 37 f.

which are believed in entire good faith to proceed only from the examination of the facts themselves?

"However anxious a man may be to get the 'bare facts' of past history, he can only understand them by bringing them into relation with his own mind; and this is not an empty mind, but a mind already furnished with personal categories and a content of its own, and disposed, therefore, to look at things in a particular way. He must of necessity, therefore, read this mental character into any new facts that are brought before him, estimate them by its canons, appropriate, assimilate them; turning them round, as it were, till he can see them in the light of his own habitual modes of thought."⁹

Such, gentlemen, are some of the difficulties presented by studies, the goal of which, according to the statement of one of those who have devoted themselves to them with great diligence, should be not only "to educate and to instruct, but to free the human mind."¹⁰

But of what consequence is *a priori* to those who too often determine the interpretation of the facts? Let us be grateful to those who for forty years have ceaselessly been bringing their stone to the mighty structure which the science of religions is going to erect, and without tarrying now over the interpre-

⁹ J. R. Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation*, London, 1908, pp. 93 f.

¹⁰ Reinach, *Orpheus*, p. 36.

tation of the facts let us survey the world of the gods of whom men have asked or are still asking appeasement for their torment.

II

At first approach we find ourselves in a world where diversity reaches incoherence and contradiction. From the animism, totemism, or fetishism of uncivilized peoples we pass to India where the worship of the cow rubs shoulders with Braminic pantheism. China makes its appearance to invite us to the worship of the dead and to the observance of a kind of Confucianism without religious root. In Japan the nature gods, "personifications of natural forces welcome one after another the emperors into a family numbering eight hundred thousand divinities. And throughout this Far East, Buddhism, more or less degenerated according to the region, offers its votaries a discipline of deliverance which implies no recognition of any divinity.

Ancient Persia, in its struggle to solve the problem of the origin of evil, invites us to the worship of two gods ever mutually hostile, one the incarnation of the principle of good, the other the principle of evil. The pantheons of Greece and Rome tell us in their mythology the stories of the gods and goddesses, peculiarly prone to experience human passions. In ancient Egypt we discover deified animals

and a solar cult. Islam alone, save for Judaism and Christianity, appears to teach a single God, a God who doubtlessly at times is a compassionate Master, but who distributes chastisements and recompenses so arbitrarily that he seems to be rather a personification of fate.

Let us add that men offer to all these gods worship whose rites, infinitely different as they are, often leave a preponderant place to magic.

What are they seeking for as they thus approach the divinities to whom they desire to pay their homage? Is it not generally to remove their anger, to conciliate them, to render them propitious? Thus in the majority of the religions of mankind the man appears concerned above all else through the medium of his worship to put the god or goddess in whom he trusts at his own disposal.

Yet let us look more closely, gentlemen, at this world where until now we have seen only manifold confusion. Thanks to the science of religions, to the labors of the ethnologists, the missionaries, and the students of folk lore we can glimpse and even grasp beneath the surface appearance a reality totally different.

For example, consider China. It is a fact that at the beginning of the Christian era Confucianists had forgotten the notion of the sublime and sovereign Sky. But the antiquity of this notion is attested

by Confucius himself. If five centuries before Jesus Christ the great moralist's one concern was to establish concrete rules which would further the formation of a class of astute statesmen, called to govern the Chinese with wisdom, it is no less true that Confucius believed what the ancients before him believed and has himself preserved for us all that now remain of these beliefs.¹¹

But two or three centuries before Confucius, belief in a Supreme Being is clearly evidenced among the Chinese. He is a being who rules, governs, recompenses or chastises, gives justice to the oppressed who direct their petitions to him. This belief appears, furthermore, among the ancient Chinese who antedate the Christian era by fifteen or twenty centuries. He is for them above all "a superior Being whom they call Sublime Sky, Sky, Sublime Sovereign, or Sovereign—four titles which are exact synonyms. The Sky gives, preserves, or takes away existence. He is the author of all relations, of all laws. He watches men and judges them. He recompenses and punishes according to merit or demerit."¹²

If from China we pass to Japan, we have difficulty, let us admit, in finding our way in the labyrinth where the "way of the gods," the *Shinto*, as the Japanese call it, seems to have eluded the Japanese

¹¹ Léon Wiegner, in *Christus*, p. 15.

¹² Wiegner, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

themselves. And yet we discern a hierarchy of divinities, gods of nature or gods in human form—personification of the heroes—at the top of which Amaterasu, the sun-goddess, sits in solemn state.

In the great Indo-European family comparative philology gives a proof beyond compare. What is Jupiter, honored by all the Latin races? What is Zeus pater of the Greek except the Sanscrit *Dyaûs pitar*? To be sure, in India the individuality of Dyaûs has somewhat lost its clearness of outline in favor of other beings; but "it is hardly open to question that we are here face to face with something primitive, and that not only is the idea of the supreme god Indo-European but that his personality has been sufficiently defined for his very name to have been preserved with a remarkable fidelity."¹⁸

Observe in passing that the name of this Dyaûs which became Zeus pater among the Greeks and Jupiter among the Latins signifies the "Bright shining," an appellation which we shall find given among races and peoples far removed from Greece and Rome to a god looked upon as Supreme Being and creator of the world.

Among the Indo-Iranians unquestionably we find at the summit of the gods two gods who are guardians of the moral order, surrounded by lesser divinities. But in ancient Persia, long before Zoroaster,

¹⁸ Albert Carnoy, *Christus*, p. 293.

Ahuramazda, "wise Spirit," is regarded as the great god, greatest of the gods, the creator of the heavens, earth, man, and goodness. And in the India of the Brahmins long before the time of Buddhism, does not Varuna remind us of the Israelitish Iahveh, founder and guardian of the cosmic and moral order? Apparently in these far distant days the gods disappeared now and again behind the image of the true God, "alone without a second," called Brahma.¹⁴

Does the religious history of Greece offer any proofs of like nature? Surely the conception of a god of the sky whose chief symbol is the thunderbolt is extremely ancient and probably primitive. But what a curious contradiction between the religion of the Greeks and their philosophy!

As early as the beginning of the sixth century before Christ, Xenophanes of Colophon in contrast to the popular views sanctioned by the Hellenic cults presented the pure idea of one God who is universal.¹⁵ Later, Plato, Aristotle, and others as well, penned noble pages about God, the divine justice, the possibility of man growing into the likeness of the Godhead, but they did not exert any influence on the religious life of their day. It seems, as has been aptly observed, that at this point the Greeks

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 305, 375, 383.

¹⁵ Cf. Brunschvicg, *Nature et Liberté*, Paris, 1901, p. 144.

paid the penalty for their æsthetic gifts.¹⁶ Similarly the Romans, engrossed "not in reflecting about the world but in using it,"¹⁷ saw in the worship they rendered their gods only a civic duty, and if they render their supreme homage to Jupiter, the primitive Indo-European god, their speculation about God is influenced by Greek philosophy alone.

What a contrast to ancient Egypt! Doubtlessly, here too, we find ourselves confronted by a medley of beliefs and worships, side by side and often contradictory. And yet in the presence of the beauties, ever new, which nature was wont to show to the Egyptians their thought soared to the idea of a Creator whose most dazzling revelation is the sun, so mighty, so beneficent, so necessary.

In the ancient empire Ra, the sun, is the greatest god; in the new empire Amon-Ra is the supreme being, creator of all, and as a papyrus phrases it, "he is unique, unique having none like him."¹⁸

This belief in a unique god is still more striking among uncivilized peoples. Indeed, it is here, gentlemen, that the science of comparative religions ap-

¹⁶ Joseph Huby, *Christus*, p. 483.

¹⁷ Martindale, *Christus*, p. 488.

¹⁸ Alexis Mallon, *Christus*, pp. 613, 615, 627, 635. Some magnificent hymns to Amon-Ra revealing a touching faith in his Providence are translated, pp. 636 ff., 658.

pears to me challenged to cast light on some most astounding facts.

Let us recognize at the start with Raoul Allier in his *Psychologie de la conversion chez les peuples non-civilisés* that "the notion of a supreme God plays little or no part in the conduct of the uncivilized man either in his acts of piety, or in his usual emotions, or in his intellect which is little concerned with theoretic problems." It is only the more striking, accordingly, that it is this notion, apparently so far removed from his usual thinking, which he accepts first of all when the missionaries offer it to him. "He gives the impression of accepting it as if it had been his before, as if he were taking back something he knows is his own. "One could say that in the animistic cults it has passed into the class of the thing which is out of date, disqualified by age, fallen into disuse."¹⁹

Furthermore, once this point is admitted, let us believe as conscientious an observer as the missionary Rusillon when he asserts "that a long list could be made of the names of the gods, memories carefully preserved by the noblest souls, while men await uncertainly their return or blessing. They have deprived themselves of the gods by their thoughtless revolt; they realize this and they blame themselves. What strikes us, as we view these different gods, is

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, Paris, 1925, vol. i, pp. 279, 282.

to see how alike they all are, as if the tradition of each people was speaking of the one God of mankind."²⁰

For example, by the Zambezi there is Nyambé, *chief god*; in equatorial Africa, Nzame, god of the Fang. In addition to them is Mawu, the supreme god of the Negritos; Molimo, "he who is above," the great god of the Basutos; Zanahary, "the ray of the sun," the "bright shining," of the Sàkalàva. The names are different, but it is always the same supreme Being who has left man because of the latter's wickedness, but whose memory has not been lost. The same belief is found more or less clearly defined among the more backward peoples, for example in the better known part of Australia which is such a favorite field of investigation for the sociologists.

Among the Eskimos, just as in the Pacific islands, a corresponding belief is to be seen in the recesses of the human mind.

God used to live among men, recounts an old Malagasy legend gathered by a missionary, but men, wearied by his oversight, no longer paid any heed to him, and God decided to abandon them. God went away, they say, but with him all that promotes our happiness. Women have become restive, men wicked. We need to find God once again; how are we to get him to return to us men?

God is unwilling to return! We must replace him. The

²⁰ Rusillon, *Le Paganisme*, p. 26.

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people need God. Let us tell them that these queer pieces of wood, these odd stones, bright shining and of vivid hues, are God. They will become accustomed to them. Perhaps then God will return?

In this manner the legend explains the origin of charms and idols.²¹

And corresponding legends besides this one in Madagascar tell the same story in many forms.

After these observations, brief though they are, the least that can be said is that all these uncivilized peoples appear to have undergone "a fall from primitive theism, for which they preserve a home-sick longing."²² This judgment, one of the most thoroughly qualified specialists in things African would certainly seem to confirm when he writes, "The majority of the negroes of Africa believe in the existence of a creator God."²³

What conclusion is to be reached, gentlemen, on this matter except that the problem of primitive monotheism which would be found at the source of human beliefs is far from being solved? Raoul Allier indicates this most judiciously in a very important note to his book: "When we took up our task," he says, "this idea of a primitive monotheism appeared to us inspired by an *a priori* dogmatism. The investigations of Père W. Schmidt [a Catholic

²¹ Rusillon, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²³ Maurice Delafosse, *La Civilisation négro-africaine*, p. 12.

scholar, universally known and respected] now appear to us disquieting. . . . The notion of a supreme Being gives the impression now and again of becoming more clearly defined the farther back through the course of the ages we go. It is recognized that scholars, and not the least of them, are declaring today that the whole problem must be taken up again."²⁴

III

This conclusion puts us in an attitude to appreciate now an interpretation of man's religious experience in high favor today: I wish to speak of the sociological interpretation.

Sociology is also a recent science. From its birth it has attached a capital importance to all the manifestations of the religious life of mankind. "We admit," Durkheim, one of its most eminent representatives, recently wrote, "that these religious beliefs rest upon a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in one sense, not one bit inferior to that of scientific experiments, though different from them."²⁵

Sociology therefore studies religions in the same manner it does the other social facts. It goes without saying that it holds fast to the method of excluding

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 284, n. 6.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 596 [E. T., p. 417].

the transcendent. It attempts to place the variations of religious experience in correlation with the transformations of the social surroundings.

Religion appears to the sociologists as "something essentially social."²⁶ "That which surpasses the individual, though it is within him," comes to him from "this super-individual reality which we experience in society."²⁷

Therefore the religious consciousness in man is the echo of the collective consciousness which in turn is "the highest form of the psychic life, since it is the consciousness of the consciousnesses."²⁸ "The collective ideal which religion expresses is far from being due to a vague innate power of the individual, but it is rather at the school of collective life that the individual has learned to idealize."²⁹

In short, "it can be said that in general everywhere and always," to use the parlance of the sociologists, "there is an intimate connection between the form of the society and that of the religious beliefs."³⁰

And here, if we had the leisure for it, it would be proper to pause at a hypothesis which occasionally has been put forward by certain sociologists as a dogmatic thesis. According to this hypothesis there

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 605 [E. T., p. 423].

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 638 [E. T., p. 447].

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 633 [E. T., p. 444].

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 604 [E. T., p. 423].

³⁰ Jean Piaget, *Immanence et Transcendance*, Geneva, 1928, p. 10.

would be an irreducible difference between those people which are called primitive and civilized; and consequently an irreducible difference between primitive societies and civilized societies, and, accordingly, a difference no less irreducible between the beliefs and religious experiences of these primitive societies and the beliefs and religious experiences of civilized societies.

That there is much truth in the theses or hypotheses enunciated by the sociologists and that after all they are extremely useful as the point of departure on new researches we should not fail to appreciate. An immense amount of work to which it is fitting to pay signal respect has been accomplished by French sociologists in particular. At the same time it is proper to observe that there is not merely one sociological school and that here as in everything else having to do with the science of religions we have to note divergences of schools and much more than slight variations in the interpretations of the facts.

Perhaps it would be needful to distinguish between sociology and *sociologisme*. If sociology, used by men who have the feel for objectivity and who endeavor to free themselves as far as possible from apriorisms, of which we have been speaking up to this point, is called to render real services, I may be permitted to say that *sociologisme*—this excessive

generalization whereby everything is to be explained by the action of society—contains grave errors.

In the first place, does the determination of the “elementary form of the religious life,” through the study of those who are called primitive, lead to sure conclusions? Each time that we undertake to explain something human, said Durkheim, it is important to go back to its origin, to come as near as possible to the most primitive and simple form of that which we intend to explain. But can we be sure of reaching the primitive people? And in these primitive people whom we believe we find in this or that province of Australia or elsewhere, are those whom we meet really primitive? Are they not instead degenerates or, from the point of view of civilization, deficient or defectives?³¹

Furthermore, the religious customs which we observe among these pretended primitives are not simple but, on the contrary, extremely complicated, allowing us a glimpse behind them of an evolution already very long.

In fact, as Delacroix observes, “the history of religions does not reach origins. When history began religion was already in existence; the study of origins is the study of something which has already commenced. We reconstruct historic origins and,

³¹ On this point the book of Raoul Allier, *Le Non-civilisé et nous*, Paris, 1927, should be read.

with greater reason, prehistory by the aid of hypothesis." And furthermore is it not an error "to believe that all creative activity has been expended at the origin and that thereafter there has been no more than conservation and development starting from a given germ?"³²

In the complex reality of the religious life history and psychology set before us a continuous collaboration of the individual and society.

Let us take care, accordingly, that we do not make evolution into a mechanical unfolding when it presents an organic development. We pretend to isolate a primitive germ in which we believe we lay hold of the essential elements of all religions. Far more it is the study of a living thing already evolved, adult, as perfect as possible, which permits only inferences about the presence in the germ of potentialities, unperceived and up to that moment imperceptible.³³

Nor is this all. We have noted in our survey of the world of the gods the very opposite of progressions, what we can call *degressions*. For example, this change, so characteristic, from a monotheism which appeared primitive—to the extent that we can speak of primitive—to distinctly inferior forms of religious life. How is this to be accounted for from

³² Delacroix, *La Religion et la foi*, pp. 402, 404.

³³ Cf. *Christus*, p. 4.

the point of view of *sociologisme*? "The language of the heathen of the present day," the missionary Rusillon points out, "chock-full of ideas which they have forgotten is better than their heart."³⁴

A remarkable fact, this, confirmed by the observations of a considerable number of missionaries among uncivilized peoples and a fact with which the thesis which we have described comes into conflict.

But *sociologisme* when applied to the study of religions is controverted even more by the simple fact of the conversion of a heathen *against* the social environ to which he belongs. If religion is something essentially social, if the religious consciousness of an individual is only the echo of the collective consciousness of the environ to which he belongs, how are we to explain the fact that in the consciousness of this individual there appear suddenly spiritual values, entirely new, as a result of which, as soon as he adopts them and integrates them in his thought and life, he sets himself in formal opposition to the most sacred traditions of the society in which he had lived hitherto?

Here it would be possible to return to the point which I only sketched and to make equally clear how the hypothesis of an irreducible difference between uncivilized and civilized breaks down before the fact that individuals belonging to peoples

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

classed as uncivilized or primitive open their life completely—not merely through compliance more or less external of mind or action, but through effective participation—to a personal faith, to a conception of the religious life, to a spiritual experience totally different from those which their surroundings had imposed upon them from the very first.

These radical transformations of individuals who have heard the preaching of the gospel of Christ from missionaries of this or that Christian communion imply a totally new attitude toward the divinity.

I pointed out a little earlier in the lecture that in the majority of the cults which are available to us for observation—alas, could we not make the same statement in many Christian circles?—we find unmistakable evidence of man's more or less conscious desire of making use of the god whom he worships. Now observe, whether in the uncivilized peoples or in the races of the Far East having a spiritual make-up entirely different from the Christian tradition, we see suddenly appearing, under the influence of the conversion of which I have just spoken, a decisive modification in their attitude toward the divinity. The god is no longer the one who is used, whose favor one wishes to gain or whose wrath he wishes to dispel; he is the God in whom is found the principle of a life which is, above all, its own gift,

corresponding to the gift of him who calls the man to participate in his life.

Let us note finally that in peoples of the most different religions the religious transformation of some of the individuals prepares the transformation of the social surroundings to which they belong. Here again we see the thesis of *sociologisme* coming into conflict with well-established facts. New societies spring up in the midst of uncivilized societies as a result of the action of a few men who have been won over to a new conception of life and are participating in their innermost being in a new religious experience.

Such are some of the objections which can be brought against *sociologisme*. Consequently, you also see, gentlemen, what is to be thought of the interpretation shared by a large number of writers according to which man leaving his animal existence would have been carried beyond inanimate and inert matter, would first have been naturistic, then animistic, then fetishistic, then idolatrous, then polytheistic, then monotheistic, and would be on the way toward *anti-clericalism* (*laïcité*).³⁵

I have endeavored, gentlemen, in the course of this study not to turn aside from the field of observations which can be verified by all cultivated minds.

³⁵ Cf. *Christus*, p. 99.

Allow me to indicate, in conclusion, the point of view a Christian thinker assumes in order to interpret the facts which I have submitted for your consideration.

The Christian is not unacquainted with the uncertainties, the obscurities, and the errors of the non-Christian religions. He knows that the gods of many among them demand from men a form of worship which is attended by the basest excitements to sensuality. And furthermore, in the grosser forms of worship as well as in the more purified ones, the Christian discerns man at all times and in all places seeking for that which will quench his inner thirst, will appease his torment. Nothing in the visible world or in nature can satisfy the aspirations of the human soul. Its hope for deliverance comes from an invisible and supernatural world.

In some circles, ill informed at that, there is much loose talk about the laughter of the heathen, of the gayety of uncivilized peoples, and the conclusion is drawn that far from having a disquieted soul, such as I have had occasion to speak of, they possess a peace which we could envy.

Do not fall into so gross an error. Those who know the heathen best, whatever form their heathenism takes, as a result of having lived long with them and having loved them deeply—need I say that these are preëminently the missionaries?—know that this

laughter is mixed with pain and bitterness. And they know, too, and Christians share their knowledge, that throughout heathenism there are "the results of a ceaseless battle bespeaking, in clumsy manner it is true, yet with sincerity, the utter anguish of men, the sadness of their hearts, the tenacity of their hopes. And pity for them is mingled with admiration for the poor human soul tirelessly groping for the Saviour son who is to lead it to God."³⁶

How is it, then, that everywhere and at all times, in the modern heathen of our cities with their luxury and wretchedness, just as in the heathen of Africa or the East the same aspiration, often such a sad one, makes its appearance? Why throughout its history has mankind been making its tearful quest? Is it a God for whom mankind preserves a mysterious homesick longing, who inspires it to seek him and who wills to make himself known through this means? Why is it so difficult for man to discover him and find him? Is he feeding on fiction? Is he, on the contrary, laying hold—can he lay hold—of reality?

Human reason, and not the heart alone, never ceases to propound these questions. Before proceeding further we should hearken to the answers which philosophy gives to them.

³⁶ Rusillon, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

III

Fiction or Reality?

WE ARE NOW, GENTLEMEN, FACE TO FACE WITH a problem of which a contemporary philosopher wrote recently that on it all the other problems are dependent, that "it is the ultimate and chief problem which cannot be sidestepped, which we meet inevitably in our path when we think or act: the problem of God." "The question of God," he added, "demands attention everywhere, always; it is inevitable. And it is precisely in this respect that it is distinct from all other questions."¹

This is an arousing question, if ever there was one, although many men, as we have already noted, seem never to have the slightest concern for it. If God does not exist, what have we who are believers, victims of an illusion whose genesis certain psychologists obligingly explain, to do except free ourselves from the old myths whereby puerile humanity has appeased its unrest? But if God does exist, are not you who are living perhaps with no concern for

¹Jacques Chevalier, *L'Idée de Dieu dans la philosophie contemporaine*.

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him, or who though superficially Christians are giving to him only a conspicuously small place in your life, are you not as foolish as the one who says in his heart, according to the Scripture, "There is no God?"²

My answer to you with regard to this question, it goes without saying, is known in advance. But today it is not a question of my personal belief or faith. I intend to set forth the solutions which some of the more characteristic tendencies of contemporary philosophy are giving to the problem of God. I shall strive to do this in a purely objective fashion, limiting myself to pointing out later, if there is opportunity, why this solution or that of those proposed cannot from the philosophic point of view be accepted.

Is it necessary to add that I cannot pretend to review all the answers proposed by philosophy—or it would be better to say, by philosophers—to the question, Does God exist? Three highly important attitudes of thought will be explained here. It will be the task of the subsequent lecture to make clear from a different angle the one I am inviting you to accept.

I

Is there a God? Let us hearken first to what the critical and agnostic rationalists tell us: It is not for

² Psalm 14:2.

us to answer this question. From our point of view we can know nothing about it. God is not an object posited by experience; he is not a fact susceptible of being perceived apart from the idea of it which we will be enabled subsequently to hold or from the interpretation of it which we will be enabled to give. We do not know God; we know simply ideas about God.

These ideas are manifold, furthermore, divergent and at times contradictory, and their sources are irreducible. Sometimes they are the imaginative creations of popular religious sentiment spontaneously born in humanity; sometimes they are metaphysical reflection face to face with the problem of the universe and life; sometimes, furthermore, they are mystic experiences. From these different sources is derived a confused and composite idea with heterogeneous elements which evokes the term God.³

Thus for the rationalists the idea of God appears as a simple product of mind. Furthermore, they say, refusal to see in it anything other than an entirely human elaboration is not to deny *a priori* its value.

These agnostics no longer deny; they do not dream of demonstrating that God does not exist. To undertake such a demonstration it would be necessary first of all to know what the object is to which the idea of God corresponds; and this is precisely

³ Cf. Belot, "Note sur la triple origine de l'idée de Dieu" in *La Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, November, 1908.

what they declare they do not know. Accordingly, they are waiting; they are waiting in all friendliness, and, we can be certain, in good faith. It is for those who affirm God to prove that he exists. "If God exists," one of these philosophers said to me again a few days ago, "he must be evident." So long as this evidence is not produced a consistent rationalist can only submit to critical examination the value of the ideas of God which those who believe in him propose.

Have we any ground from the philosophical point of view for objecting to this refusal to answer the question, when such is the motive for the refusal? Yes indeed.

Reason is always being invoked. Are we so sure, nevertheless, that when we speak in the name of reason that what we are affirming is actually reason *per se*, impersonal reason ever uncontaminated by anything proceeding from the *ego* that employs it, his weaknesses or his passions! And then would it not be necessary to be agreed with regard to the precise meaning of the word "reason"? According to the philosophers of whom I am speaking the unique characteristic of reason seems to be to extend the relations of difference which are provided in nature to the logical relations of identity and of contradiction. Is it necessary to recall with Boutroux

that according to reason there are other relations than relations of identity and contradiction?

"By reason," said Boutroux, "which philosophers have sought to define in every age, is meant exactly that quality peculiar to man of attributing reality and value to relations which do not extend to identity or to incompatibility in a form logically pure and simple. Metaphysics is properly the superposition of relations of this type to relations which are merely logical."⁴

And did not Cournot discern, in his turn, "behind the *logical* order we insert into phenomena a more profound order, not dependent upon verbal categories, but upon realities, . . . a *rational* order, or better still, a *trans-rational* order, which extends the boundaries of our reason without contradicting it, of which, in the end, God alone possesses the secret?"⁵

"Furthermore, the keenest critical spirit"—it is one of our rationalists who is speaking—"and the most scientific sets its limits for critical over-insistence. It appears rational that everything should not be rationalized. There also it is necessary to accept an irreducible *datum*. Will the mind in order to dare to think ask to have comprehended the play

⁴ *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, February, 1909, p. 26.

⁵ J. Chevalier, *Bergson*, Paris, 1926, p. 13 [E. T., p. 13].

of the brain and the beating of the heart? It is impossible to prove anything without trusting some postulates accepted as ultimate."⁶

We are also told that God is not an object given in experience. It is added that religious experience is a purely psychological experience which can acquire a religious significance or character only by an interpretation the elements of which are borrowed from a given religion, externally ready made.⁷

But first of all, is it permissible to speak of God, of the transcendent God, as an "object"? We do not think it is. And without stopping today with the question of religious experience are we not justified in asking in what measure it is legitimate to give an interpretation of religious experience which is uniquely subjective?

Durkheim, we have seen, recognized in religious experience a specific character and, from his point of view, a demonstrative value. Is the presentation of the object of study—that is, religious experience—in a subjective sense anything save sheer mutilation?⁸

It is added, furthermore, that the object of belief in God is changeable and mutable, that it proceeds

⁶ Belot, *La Discipline sociale et le développement de l'esprit critique*, p. 23.

⁷ Belot, *Note sur la triple origine de l'idée de Dieu*, p. 721.

⁸ Cf. Dallièrre, "De l'expérience à la métaphysique" in *Semeur*, November, 1928, p. 5.

from diverse and mutually irreducible sources, and from this it is inferred that the idea of God is sheer fabrication of the mind. But can not the same be said of everything which man has sought to know? For example, think of the world. Has the world of Aristotle anything in common with the world of Descartes? Is it not different from the world of Einstein? And are we to conclude from these differences between the representations of the world which not only popular imagination but philosophic thought as well have made that the world is not given in experience?

Ah, how well we understand how Pascal could reach so radical a skepticism with regard to the results which scientific research could achieve!

You recall this note flung in as if at random across the manuscript of the *Thoughts*: "To write against those who make too profound a study of science."⁹ And you remember also this more extended thought: "We must say emphatically, 'That is made by figure and motion,' for it is true. But to say what these are, and to compose the machine, is ridiculous. And were it all true, we do not think that all philosophy [and in this term Pascal includes scientific research] is worth one hour of pain."¹⁰

And furthermore: this attitude in which the

⁹ *Thoughts*, § 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, § 79.

agnostic rationalists pretend to fortify themselves appears, when we examine it closely, as a snare and a delusion.

I seem to hear once more certain discussions at which I had the opportunity of being present a few years since. Believers of different communions and unbelievers of different philosophic schools met together to set forth to one another with all the sincerity and exactness they were capable of their reasons for affirming or not affirming God. I still hear one of the representatives of the believers replying, in one of those conversations which I hope will be published some day, to the opponent who had just affirmed his unbelief, justifying it on precisely the grounds which I have set forth: "By taking this attitude you are seeking to act as a man would, should he be outside mankind and should he remark, as he sees mankind struggling and propounding for itself questions about its origin and destiny, 'I am quite content to stand by and watch its unrest and I am waiting for it to bring me a solution which appears acceptable to me. . . .' No one takes this attitude, and it is a snare to pretend to. The least of our ideas and proceedings has a meaning and place in the working of the whole, and consequently implies a conception of the universe and a conception of the relation which we occupy with the source of the universe. It is impos-

sible for us to be aware of ourselves and to act consciously and at the same time remain metaphysically and religiously neutral."

And this philosopher-believer added: "You say, 'I do not deny God, I am waiting for some one to show him to me or to give me proof of him.' Yet while you are thus waiting you believe you can give a meaning to your life and can organize it without recourse to him. And by that very fact you consider that those who have recourse to him in order to find an explanation of the world and in order to explain themselves to themselves are victims of self-delusion. . . . Now is not that the very same as denying God? Accordingly, I am right in saying that you are not waiting."¹¹

Finally, our agnostic rationalists appear to demand before they will believe in God that proofs be brought them, proofs which by the evidence which they themselves bring will compel assent, while they themselves seem to feel at perfect liberty when such proofs are offered them to say with Le Dantec that they are of value to those alone who already believe in God, and that they merely prove that those who set them forth believe in God.¹² We shall see later

¹¹ I am quoting here words of Père Laberthonnière in reply to the statement of Belot, the essential elements of which I have reproduced above.

¹² Le Dantec, *L'Athéisme*, p. 34.

why this evidence is impossible and why it is not *rational* to ask believers for a proof of God which would force itself on unbelievers after the manner of a geometrical demonstration.

Therefore, let us not pretend that we do not know God. To say that we do not know him is to have already decided. "Ignorance on this point is to all intents and purposes only a disguised denial."¹³

II

Other rationalists give us a less dilatory reply. Far from avoiding the question, they affirm God. Only we must understand what the God is in whom they believe. The idealists of whom I am speaking are the heirs of Descartes and Kant. In the "I think" of Descartes they discover a thought which is "capable of the universe" and which its objectivity raises to the dignity of a principle of universal communion. Following Kant they inclose the world within a system of perfected concepts, "the *form* of cognition takes precedence over its *matter*; the law over the *datum*; the *concept* over the *intuition*; and these concepts," remarks a contemporary author, "are neither molded nor regulated by their objects; on the contrary, the objects or the experience which makes them known to us are regulated by their

¹³ J. Chevalier, *L'Idée de Dieu*.

concepts, so that what we know of things is confined to what we ourselves put into them."¹⁴

It is evident, consequently, that idealism unreservedly condemns traditional theology and a realist type of metaphysics, reproaching both of them with having taken their point of departure in what it calls the dogmatism of common sense.

"From the abstract principle of causality, the critical idealists say, we pretend to deduce the existence of a concrete cause; we conjecture a being located somewhere outside the world whom we invent for the express purpose of furnishing thereby an adequate reason. . . . Or furthermore, under the pretext of divine finality we make the course of nature contingent upon the fluctuation of caprice and passion which save in outward appearance only reproduce the alternatives of human feeling."¹⁵

But how, according to them, has man been led to conjecture this God whom they denounce when he is proposed by traditional theology, as the fruit of a puerile imagination?

We are directed to observe that in prehistoric times the genus homo was distinguished from the other animal species by the inventions of tools by means of which man's increasing power over mat-

¹⁴ J. Chevalier, *Bergson*, p. 293 [E. T., p. 324].

¹⁵ Brunschvicg, *Surnaturel ou Spirituel* (communication in *Union pour la vérité*, March-April, 1928), p. 92.

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ter manifested itself. Accordingly, it is not surprising, they say, that the curiosity of primitive mentality, which in so many respects resembles the mentality of the child, satisfied itself in conjecturing an artificer of the world after the model of the human workman. Or rather, starting from the characteristic function of life which is reproduction, man pictures to himself God after the model of the *pater familias*. In all of this there is only a *transcendent artificiality* which the advance of critical reflexion through the last three centuries has destroyed.¹⁶ God is neither in nature nor in history. "To make him an individual who would have exercised physical power over things and over men, who would have taken part in the contests of earthly interests—this is to materialize him."¹⁷

Consequently, the transcendent God, spiritual substance, creator of the world, is for our philosophers no more "than a symbol which we owe to mythological and childish imagination, and which bears no relation to God in spirit and in truth whom conscience postulates."¹⁸

But where are we to find this God? For the idealist he remains inaccessible to reason, but thought finds him "by retiring within itself and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 80.

¹⁷ Brunschvicg, *Nature et Liberté*, p. 149.

¹⁸ Piaget, *Immanence et Transcendance*, Geneva, 1928, p. 28.

scrutinizing its own activity." "God is thought. He is not a being but the condition of existence; and the condition of existence is thought."¹⁹

Will this God whose radical immanence is thus being proclaimed be less real than the transcendent God? Quite the contrary, the idealists maintain. "To make a being of God is to compromise the divine reality." Common sense believes that things are more truly real than thought, but it is sorely mistaken. "The world of sense is less real than thought; it is real only in relation to the thought which regulates it. Reality and thought form an indissoluble whole."²⁰

Do we not end here, gentlemen, in a confusion of the divine and the ego? No, answer our interlocutors, for "interiority and subjectivity have nothing in common save a verbal resemblance. There are three, not two, terms, one of which is to be chosen: transcendence, the *ego*, and finally, thought with its impersonal norms. But immanence amounts to identifying God not with the psychological ego, but with the norms of thought itself. . . . The norms have nothing in common with the ego. They impose themselves on the ego. They infinitely surpass the ego. They are the true and only expression of the

¹⁹ Piaget, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

divine which neither psychology nor sociology would know how to menace."²¹

Thus we have a "means of uniting ourselves to a principle, the existence of which is attested by a unique intellectual perception, *presence*," and which causes us to discover in God "that pure and personal reality which demands in each of us spiritual life."²²

Such, gentlemen, is the dialectic whereby we comply with what idealism calls religion of the Word (Verbe), already affirmed by Cartesianism. "Restored to the purity of its intellectual origin the Word excludes all division which changes its unity, all personification which mars its spirituality. . . . God who exists in spirit and in truth is the Word, spirit, and truth. For us, say the idealists, the center of gravity of the religious life lies there, in the pure spirituality of the principle of communion. That which enables us to understand—and we understand only universally—is that which enables us to love truly with a disinterested love. *God is reason* means precisely *God is love*."²³

Consequently, I think, you give greater heed to man's faith in a providential rule of the universe or in some sort of hope of future life; "faith is excluded

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37.

²² Brunschvicg, *Nature et Liberté*, p. 151.

²³ Brunschvicg, *Surnaturel ou spirituel*, p. 83.

from idealism because of the semi-skepticism which attends it like its shadow; and similarly hope, which, by its very definition, is inseparable from fear. Charity regains from this its original meaning: *caritas humani generis*, a radical deepening of the order of natural affections which brings their universal compass to light."²⁴

"Where two men are joined in the name of the divinity it is not that a third member comes to add himself to them from without. . . . But through their mutual understanding and their intimate co-operation these two men become aware that in each of them is present a principle of spiritual unity which could not have been gained without contradiction except from its radical immanence."²⁵

For the critical idealists "spiritual immanence is most certainly the achievement of true religion."²⁶

I hope to convince you, gentlemen, that the thesis which I am trying to state to you as honestly and as objectively as possible is unacceptable, I do not say from the religious point of view which we do not have under consideration today, but from the philosophic point of view.

I ought to point out, however, that from many pages written by contemporary idealists there is

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

given off a spiritual atmosphere, more than that, a deeply religious one. Many of their words have for the believer a genuinely Christian resonance.

When a man like Léon Brunschvicg writes that the principle of love stands on equal terms with the principle of reason and that "without love nothing would be explained"²⁷ I feel myself in the presence of a soul which has grasped in its profundity the secret of things, and which, if it interprets the secret in a manner entirely different than do we believers, yet gives us none the less the impression that we have communion with it in our common apprehension of basic reality.

Yet how many objections offer themselves to the mind in the face of such a thesis! Surely we are grateful to idealism for forcing us to join it in criticizing certain notions of transcendence which, let us fully admit, smack of gross realism. And we see indeed why modern idealism has such an aversion for the very idea of a being outside of or transcending our spirit and why it even ends "in no longer considering intelligible a realistic type of knowledge which would be anything more than a product or a projection of the thought which thinks it, a creation of the subject, corresponding to no previously self-existent object."²⁸ Is it not precisely because the

²⁷ *Nature et Liberté*, p. 154.

²⁸ *L'itinéraire philosophique de Maurice Blondel*, Paris, 1928, p. 219.

idealists are always denouncing by the epithet "transcendent" a *thing* which we are not affirming when we speak of the transcendence of God? In the transcendent God they see some powerful Absolute, completely external to human consciousness and totally different from it. But why set transcendence in opposition to immanence? Why say: God is outside us *or* God is in us? I intend to prove in our next discussion precisely this, that immanence to which we are told we must give full place implies the transcendence of God.

Would not the abuse and error of the idealists arise from the fact, queries Maurice Blondel, that although they rightly prove that we can know reality only *through* active thought, they infer from this that we know it only *as* subjective action, as immanent creation, as ideal production?²⁹

We are told that reality coincides with thought. We shall see presently that this affirmation is disputed by other philosophers. But whether we wish it or not does not such an affirmation result in a deification of reason and of the norms of thought which, save perhaps in a few noble spirits, becomes reduced to a divinization of humanity?

This tendency is already present in Kant. But if for him intellectual intuition, cognition which produces its object, can pertain only to God, for his

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

modern disciples it is the appanage of man and accordingly the universe becomes a creation of human thought.

Is not the logical and inevitable word for this entire movement of thought a kind of pantheism which masks a more or less unconscious deification of man?

We are told, furthermore, that science leads the way to religious life. Is it certain that the notion of science on which we lean is not outgrown today?

What is science? Boutroux defined it as "the ceaseless progress of the human mind in quest of the explanation of things through things themselves." And he added: "Science from its own point of view is self-sufficient. To establish itself today it has no occasion for transcendent principles or ends. It is reduced to a method of determining the facts and their observable connections. Does it follow that it is self-sufficient from the point of view of reason?" No, for "science posits necessarily the existence of being as a *model*, fundamentally distinct from itself, of which it strives to give us a humanly useful translation. . . . Science concerns itself only with facts; it is the human mind which constructs it (*sc.* science). It forms her of concepts, signs, symbols, which it invents for the purpose of using in its own way objects which are dissimilar from it. . . . And so as science conjectures being and cannot reduce it,

so it conjectures mind of which it is the handiwork. . . . What does this signify except that from the point of view of reason science conjectures outside of us a creative activity which provides it with material for observation; within us an activity equally creative which conceives workable symbols adapted for representing inaccessible realities?"³⁰

But can science really represent these inaccessible realities of which Boutroux speaks? Certain contemporary scholars dispute this.

An eminent physicist asks us to observe that the real purpose of theoretic physics appears to be to discover and to study the mathematical forms into which physical phenomena can be cast. To assign this rôle to theoretic physics is undoubtedly to make this science share the exactness of mathematics. But it also serves to mark out for it its limits. Back of the harmony which reveals to us the possibility of casting phenomena into analytic molds is hidden a reality, the essence of which remains tremendously unknown."³¹

And the scholar and philosopher Meyerson whose works have exerted so strong an influence for several years strenuously maintains these two theses: "Science is not only a pragmatic utilization of real-

³⁰ *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, February, 1909, pp. 27, 32 f.

³¹ L. de Broglie, "La Physique moderne et Fresnel" in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, December, 1927.

ity; it aims at theoretic explanation. It has to do with reality itself and not with mere representative signs or conventions of calculus." "One of the well-known theses of Meyerson is that science everywhere runs afoul of 'irrationals,' that is, of data irreducible to what science understands as reason, that is, reason which resolves and sets forth." And indeed one of his disciples could write that "the conclusion of Meyerson is definitively that of Pascal: man knows only the betwixt and between of things; first principles and ultimate consequences elude him."³²

Furthermore, on the part of the idealists is there not almost a renunciation of the fundamental task of philosophy? Is it not this task to give a complete meaning to the universe and in the universe to human life? We are invited to renounce uncertain and venturesome speculation about the origins or final ends of the universe. They refuse to raise certain questions. In spite of everything these questions are raised: Whence comes the human mind? Whence is it that in the human mind there appears this curiosity concerning which we are told that by it mankind differs from the other animal species? Whence is it that in the human mind there can arise this dialectic which we admire in a Lagneau, in a Brunschvicg, and which, proceeding from the very

³² André Metz, in "Qu'est-ce que la Science?" (No. 5, *Nouvelle Journée*). Cf. Paul Archambault, *La Renaissance religieuse*, p. 38.

conditions of thought and by the most searching examinations, claims to attain to the God of whom it tells us? Is there not there an indication of a finality of which it is quite impossible for us not to attempt to take account?

Finally, from the religious point of view which here rejoins the philosophical point of view it appears that idealism preserves, unintentionally I am convinced, a dangerous ambiguity. It speaks of God; it offers itself to us as a religion of conversion and even of grace. Actually, is this not to trifle with words? How would this impersonal God be conscious of his divinity? And yet idealism refuses him the right of forgetting his divinity for the purpose of interesting himself in the individual. "It is impossible," it says with Spinoza, "for one who loves God to ask God to love him in his turn."³³

Consequently, what can be the significance of repentance or pardon? What becomes of prayer? What is the grace of a God who is without consciousness and without love? Are these, as we are given to understand, only illusions of which we should rid ourselves? Is it not rather, as I am convinced, that idealism welcomes only a fragment of human experience? Is its postulate, "Only that which is rational is universal, constitutes a principle of communion, is human," acceptable? I do not

³³ Brunschvicg, *Nature et Liberté*, p. 157.

think it is. Do we not see evidence of this, to take but one example, in the gracefulness, which Gabriel Marcel commented on, with which idealism "debarks" the problem of immortality and sets aside resolutely one of the profoundest demands of the human soul?³⁴

Truly, gentlemen, the God whom they offer us is a fiction, whatever they may tell us, and we find ourselves face to face with a religious atheism which we are justified in thinking does not solve and does not even state, in exact terms, the religious problem of the kind which surges up in humanity tormented by this unrest before which in its constant recurrences, we have paused.

III

To this pantheistic—and from our point of view atheistic—idealism is opposed a movement which we must consider briefly.

The philosophers who represent it could say with Secrétan: "For every one who has faith in reason, existence itself and the imperious needs of human reason reveal that a first principle exists. . . . We admit then that human thought has *reason* to wish to understand the universe and to find its principle, the absolute and only principle."³⁵ That is the task

³⁴ G. Marcel, *Surnaturel ou spirituel*, pp. 106, 111.

³⁵ F. Abauzit, *L'Enigme du monde et sa solution selon Charles Secrétan*, Paris, 1922, pp. 18 f.

to which, under the inspiration of Pascal, perhaps, to a degree, of the realism of the Middle Ages, of Augustine at any rate, is devoted a school which, from Maine de Biran through Ravaisson, Secrétan, Lachelier, Boutroux, and even Bergson, ends in this spiritual realism which men like Laberthonnière, Blondel, Chevalier, Archambault are teaching today in different forms. Today I shall mention only this phase of it which is to pave the way for our next study.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bergson remarked, "France had a great metaphysician, the greatest she has produced since Descartes and Malebranche—Miran de Biran."³⁶

"I have often been greatly puzzled," writes Maine de Biran one day in his journal, "to conceive how it is that the Spirit of Truth can be in us without being ourselves, or without losing its identity in blending with our own spirit, our ego. Now I understand this matter of intimate intercourse with a spirit superior to our own, which speaks to us, which we hear within ourselves, which animates and impregnates our spirit without being merged in it. . . . This intimate communion of the Spirit with our own spirit . . . is an actual psychological fact and not an act of faith alone."³⁷

³⁶ Bergson, *La Philosophie*, Paris, 1915, p. 15.

³⁷ December 20, 1823. Quoted by Chevalier, *Bergson*, p. 19 [E. T., p. 19].

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As a result Maine de Biran is led to move the center of his philosophy and to place it not in man but in God.

By his study of habit Ravaisson reveals in it an activity which has passed by insensible degrees from consciousness to unconsciousness, from free will to automatism. The apparent mechanism incident to things would be the residuum of free activity of the spirit. Accordingly, instead of proceeding from abstraction to abstraction, from generality to generality, as the intelligence naturally does, "there would be," as Bergson says, "quite another course open to us. This would be to extend the vision of the eye by a mental vision. . . . It would mean piercing, by a mighty effort of mental vision, the material envelope which surrounds things, and going forward to read the formula, invisible to the eye, which their materiality can unfold and display. Then the unity which binds entities to one another would be manifested, the unity of a train of thought which, from crude matter to plant life, from plant to animal life, from animal to human life, we find ever gathering itself together, enfolding itself in its own substance, until at last, by one concentration after another, we come to the divine thought which thinks all things in thinking itself."³⁸

³⁸ Bergson, *Notice sur la vie et les œuvres de M. Félix Ravaisson*, quoted in Chevalier, *Bergson*, p. 19 [E. T., pp. 20 f.].

But the unity of which he is here speaking does not reveal itself to the philosophers who are content with the method of analysis. "This," remarks Ravaisson, "descends by one decomposition after another as far as the most abstract and bare elements." Analysis should produce synthesis which maintains "that nothing proceeds from nothing, that nothing happens, and nothing exists, without a reason, *i.e.*, without a governing principle and an aim. It does not pretend to explain the higher by the lower, life by death, being by nothingness; but rising from reason to reason which is self-justified and all sufficient unto itself, in a word, to the apex of the perfect humanity which is wisdom and infinite love, as well as plenitude of spiritual liberty, it grasps in nature, as it were, a reflection, a dispersion or a *distension* of the mind, so that God serves for the understanding of the soul, and the soul, of nature."⁸⁹

By another road Lachelier arrives at similar views. "The world," he asserts against abstract rationalism, "necessarily possesses all the modalities that our thought demands for its exercise. Thought demands unity; all phenomena, therefore, are subject to the law of efficient causes, which connects them all in a necessary way and forms them into a continuous whole. This law indeed is the sole foundation we can cite to account for the unity of the universe.

⁸⁹ Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 21 [E. T., p. 22].

But . . . [our thought] desires to apprehend itself . . . as actual. And thus 'abstract existence, whose peculiar quality is mechanical necessity, itself stands in need of finding a prop in concrete existence, which belongs to the category of ends alone.' . . . Finality is not merely one method; it is the only complete method of accounting for thought and nature. The true reasons for things are their ends or aims. . . . Nevertheless, finality is not self-sufficing. . . . No explanation can be found for it save in an act of free will. The law of final causes absolutely demands *liberty*."⁴⁰

Thus for *material idealism*, according to Ravaisson and Lachelier, is substituted a spiritual realism, "to which every being is a force, and every force a train of thought tending to more and more complete consciousness of itself."⁴¹ "The world," Lachelier writes in *Fondement de l'induction*, "is a thought which does not think itself suspended to a thought which does." And in a note of 1901 he concludes: "The highest problem in philosophy, and one which is possibly already more religious than philosophical, is the transition from the formal absolute to the real and living absolute, from the idea of God to God."⁴²

It is in the depths of the inner life that Emile

⁴⁰ Chevalier, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 f. [E. T., pp. 25 f.]. The quoted words are from Lachelier's *Fondement de l'induction*, p. 83.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26 [E. T., p. 27].

⁴² *Ibid.*

Boutroux, following the example of Pascal, seeks the point of departure for his philosophy. Consciousness, giving the lie to science, affirms that he is free. "Scientific theories must yield to this testimony of consciousness. . . . The initial principle whence one must start is not determinism, a mere structure erected by our understanding. It is liberty, which obtrudes itself on our consciousness as a tact." "Necessity [in the physical universe] is an acquired form, not a first cause; it rests upon contingency and can not do away with it. The laws of nature are its habits.' The order which rules nature is not determinism, but contingency."⁴³

And so, for Boutroux, "necessity, far from explaining the universe, must itself have its explanation and its source in a first principle which the positive sciences are already seeking through phenomena—God. He is the perfect and necessary being, whose creative action we feel in our inmost depths in our efforts to approach him, the supreme creator and legislator. . . . All contingency proceeds from the great initial contingency, which is creation. This universe is a created universe."⁴⁴

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28 f. [E. T., pp. 30 f.] ["Consciousness" is the rendering of "la conscience" in the authorized translation of the cited work, and is accordingly here reproduced with some misgiving. It is one of several cases where it is most difficult to decide between "conscience" and "consciousness."—TRANSLATOR.]

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31 [E. T., pp. 32 f.].

Are we right in seeing in the philosophy of Bergson a new stage of this movement of thought, the stages of which I have just traced for you very imperfectly?

It has been justly said of the Bergsonian doctrine that it is one powerful effort to reintroduce into our cognition reality which is its solid basis.⁴⁵ It is precisely because of this that it is opposed to the philosophy of the contemporary disciples of Kant. But is it legitimate to invoke in support of a realism which affirms the transcendence of a creator God the testimony of Bergson, whose thought still remains unformulated on some of the essential points? I believe that it is, gentlemen, and for proof of this I want only these few lines of a letter written in 1911 by the philosopher to Père de Tonguédec, collaborator of the *Etudes*:

"The considerations set forth in my *Essai sur les données immédiates*," wrote Bergson, who since that time, so far as I know, has never denied these words, "tend to demonstrate the fact of freedom; those in *Matter and Memory*, I hope, make actual and real for us the reality of the spirit; those in *Creative Evolution* present God as a fact; from all this there stands out clearly the idea of a God, creative and free, the generator at once of matter and of life, where creative effort is continued in the realm of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 293 [E. T., pp. 323 f.].

life by the evolution of species and by the constitution of human personalities. From all this there stands out, accordingly, the refutation of monism and of pantheism in general."⁴⁶

You see, gentlemen, we are concerned not with the childish imagination of humanity making its first bow, but with a train of thought which is sure of itself and which goes on irresistibly to the affirmation of a creative and free God.

"Incomprehensible," cry the idealists. To which Pascal replies, "Not all that is incomprehensible ceases to exist."⁴⁷

"How," some one will further ask, "can a mystery which is by definition unintelligible render its object intelligible? As well say that it is obscurity which casts light on things." No! The idea of creation, the idea of the creator God, is like the sun whereby we see everything without being able to see it or at least to fix our eyes upon it.

"The most inconceivable mystery of all, creation, is also the condition for the intelligibility of everything. Suppress it and you are forced to multiply the mystery in order to explain merely one part of the universe, casting all the rest into the realm of mere appearance and nothingness." On the contrary, "Grant creation; everything which exists has a rea-

⁴⁶ Letter of June 12, 1911, published in *Etudes* of February 20, 1912.

⁴⁷ *Thoughts*, § 430.

son for existence, although this reason most often eludes us. But even this ignorance is of little consequence," observes one of Bergson's disciples, Jacques Chevalier, "the thing that is most essential is not to know what the reason is, but to know there is a reason."⁴⁸

Let us stop here, gentlemen, and conclude for to-day with Pascal: "There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition."⁴⁹

This light, which I could wish to make manifest to all those who are seeking with all the loyalty of their thought and often also with such anguish of conscience, will perhaps appear brighter if, taking our stand now within ourselves, we face up resolutely no longer to the problem of God nor even to the problem of the world, but to the problem which is after all the essential problem for you and me—the problem which we ourselves are to ourselves.

For this task our next discussion is designed.

⁴⁸ *Trois Conférences d'Oxford*, Paris, 1928, pp. 15, 26 ff.

⁴⁹ *Thoughts*, § 430 (end).

IV

God, a Problem or the Solution of the One and Only Problem?

BEFORE WE STATE THE PROBLEM WHICH WE ARE to examine today and before we indicate the solution which it appears to me to permit, let us attempt, gentlemen, to summarize the result of our previous studies. And indeed the last stage which we have traversed has appeared to many a bit dry. All the more reason for us to pause and see where we are.

We have established undeniably that everywhere and always there has been in man an aspiration, a thirst, a feeling of unrest, a torment of something or some one which outdistances him. We have called this the torment of God. Religions are a sign of this torment, but they claim also to offer an appeasement for it. Amid the extreme diversity of beliefs and rites the non-Christian religions have allowed us to catch a glimpse at their origin of an almost universal belief in a Supreme Being who is both Creator and Providence.

Then we asked the philosophers if their reflections upon the universe and life led them to an affirmation

of God. Some avoided the question. Others answered us yes, but, rejecting all affirmation of a transcendent God, they offered us a radically immanent God who becomes merged with impersonal reason and with the imperative and universal laws of thought. Others, furthermore, who had no fear of metaphysics, invited us to follow a different road. Taking their point of departure in man and adopting thus an immanent approach, they led us to discern a reality which does not coincide with thought, but which transcends things and thought, and brought us to a God who freely created the world.

The critical idealism of some, the immanent approach of others have accordingly prepared us to see clearly that there is at bottom only one problem—the problem of man.

Why is this so? It is just this which we are going to see.

I

That from the consideration of visible things human reason can rise to a sure knowledge of invisible realities and even of the supreme reality which is God, I am at pains not to forget.

I could show you the modern disciple of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Neothomists as they are called, who regard as their particular mission the reestablishment of a metaphysics which follows the

example of the metaphysics of Aristotle in taking its point of departure in things, in sense-data. But on the one hand the analogical knowledge of God which Thomism teaches does not appear to me to correspond to the data of the problem which we shall see rise. And on the other hand, although I recognize full well the strength and interest of the metaphysical structure of the Thomists, I observe that, proceeding by the dialectic of totally abstract reason, this metaphysics, which wishes to go from visible things to God, necessarily introduces visible things into our concepts and restores them to our thought. This observation St. Augustine had already made. He too judged it possible to leave the world of sense in order to go to God, but remarked that this path led of necessity to reason. Whatever place a man may leave, whatever he may do, he must pass through thought, and thus he who thinks is brought back to self.

"Man," said Pascal, "is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now the order of thought is to begin with self, and with its Author and its end."¹

And then, gentlemen, let us suppose that we have found the solution of the problem of things, of their relation to us, of the reality which they manifest,

¹ *Thoughts*, § 146.

and of their origins; another problem arises: What attitude are we going to have toward this visible world—that is, what meaning are we going to give to our life?

Surely each man in one way or another gives a meaning and value to his life, but most often without thinking about it, just as each one constructs a metaphysics without knowing it or desiring it. But beyond the more or less unconscious solutions we have to discern the problem, and since we are alive and must, whether we will or no, give a meaning to our life it is much more important for us to solve this problem than to solve the others. Or, rather, to give a solution to other problems and to leave this one unexamined and unsolved is to have done nothing with regard to our chief task.

If we are no longer concerned with raising the question of God, now that we are leaving the visible world behind, we are no longer concerned with raising it now that we are leaving behind a particular conception of God already given. There have been, no doubt, in the history of humanity, long periods in which the mind of man, adhering as it were naturally to God, the source and end of the universe, did not hesitate to take the God of religious tradition for the point of departure of its speculation. It is no longer so today. For a large number of men God can no longer be a point of departure;

at most he will be a point of arrival. The spectacle of the world, occasions of suffering and human misery, countless acts of cruelty of nature lead troublesome consciences to call in question the God in whom they had been taught to see all-goodness and all-power. No one in our days would know how to affirm God, whatever instruction or aid he receives from without, unless he has been induced to take such a step through intimately personal reasons.

Whatever the doctrine of transcendence to which we can arrive, we ought to establish it, accordingly, by an immanental approach.² Furthermore, it is not man in general—and that abstractly—whom we have to consider, but ourselves.

This—everyone will agree—is no innovation. Pascal, whom we never weary of asking for new inspirations, had perceived clearly that the essential problem is the problem which we ourselves are to ourselves. Not that he ever loses sight of God, who must be “the final end as he alone is the true principle”; but he knew that this God must be sought to be found, and that “he who without us has made us cannot save us without us.”³

However, if Pascal was the first to reveal fully the data of the problem which man is to himself, all he

² On this point see Jacques Chevalier, *Trois Conférences d'Oxford*, Paris, 1928, pp. 34 f.

³ *Ibid.*

did was to state with preciseness a very ancient method which St. Augustine and the great mystics already followed. It is from themselves, viewed from within, that a St. Augustine and a Saint John of the Cross took their start, and they elaborated, accordingly, a spiritual metaphysics not in terms of abstract concepts, but of their soul in all its many phases, in terms of the living reality which they knew themselves to be.⁴

Let us endeavor to take the same point of departure and to follow the same road.

II

How does the problem which we ourselves are to ourselves arise in each of us?

And, first of all, I will ask myself with Fallot, Am I an illusion or a reality? If I am an illusion, I cannot know whether there is anything real, for the act of conceiving something real would yield me the idea of reality and consequently something real; no longer would I be solely an illusion. Now I have the idea of the real; accordingly, I possess some reality; I am a reality.⁵

But the reality which I am tends to self-disclosure.

⁴ See in the *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* (May-June, 1925) Père Laberthonnière's critique of Baruzi's work on the method of St. John of the Cross.

⁵ Cf. Marc Boegner, *la Vie et la Pensée de T. Fallot*, vol. ii, pp. 314 f.

We wish to explain ourselves to ourselves. That which marks us as men is that we are capable of looking within and understanding ourselves. "To be a man is to be aware of self—that is, *to know one's self*."⁶ But, in order to know ourselves and to understand ourselves it is not enough that through the words "I" or "me" we consciously separate ourselves from the outer world; it is no longer enough that through a consciousness of self to the extent of being moral we separate ourselves from our purely organic ego. We must further assemble ourselves in the dispersion of time and space. Only then is our soul enabled through its growing self-awareness to apprehend itself as a living "interiority." Do you not begin to see from this that in order really to know ourselves we must disengage ourselves from visible things, from representations—the images—which they leave in us in which our sensuality, our pride, and our egotism are nourished?⁷

What will we discover in our inmost depths? Can we grasp there the very source of our life, of the being and reality within us of which we are aware? By no means. We are not the source of our being. Life has been given us; we submit to it. We have come into existence without our knowledge and

⁶ Laberthonnière, *Bulletin* . . . , p. 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

without our volition. We have not chosen race or time or the surroundings in which we live. We are entirely dependent upon the past, upon generations which have passed away, upon ancestors we have never known but who live in us, in our very nature. We are dependent upon a world outside ourselves, representations of which ceaselessly pervade us and come and disquiet our sensibility. And above all we are dependent upon a source which reveals us in us by the very fact that we are alive. We have imposed ourselves upon ourselves. Dependence with regard to things, dependence with regard to life—that is what first of all we find in ourselves.

And yet, gentlemen, if we experience this deep and acute feeling of dependence, we come upon another reality within us. We live and we wish to live. When we become conscious of our dependence, it seems to us that *we are nothing in and of ourselves*; yet for all that the conviction obtrudes itself upon us that *we ought to be*.

Deep within ourselves we discover the will to live, to live a life ever more intense, to live infinitely, and in this will to live, investing it with a unique quality, we discover an aspiration to surpass ourselves, even more a need of being ourselves, of possessing ourselves, of realizing all the potentialities which we sense as present in us. This insistent demand of autonomy is in us as an obligation to be

ourselves, but always also as the obligation to be more than ourselves.

What we discover in ourselves, psychology and history reveal in every man. Whenever man has chanced upon men he has never found a man who did not create for himself obligations at least toward himself "according to the idea which he sets for himself of what a man such as he ought to be."⁸ In this which the man is—whatever it may be—he is conscious of being traversed by an *ought to be*—whatever may be the form in which it makes its presence felt—which prevents him from relying upon what he is. And if it appears to him at times—let us observe in passing—that this *ought to be* constitutes at the horizon of his moral life as it were a new nature which he ought to acquire, in this very effort to arise to it he becomes convinced that this new nature cannot be veneered in any manner upon the nature which was given to him, but that it is this nature itself revived through the recognition of its true source of origin and through the acceptance of its real end.

Such is the contradiction which we see clearly revealed in ourselves.

From the chance meeting of this obligation to realize ourselves and to be ourselves with the thor-

⁸ Renouvier, *Critique philosophique*, Quarterly supplement, 1880, p. 21.

oughgoing dependence which we have pointed out is born unrest, the torment whereby man is distinguished from all the other species of animals.

Let us gain once more its echo in Pascal: "Man does not know in what rank to place himself. He has plainly gone astray, and fallen from his true place without being able to find it again. He seeks it anxiously and unsuccessfully everywhere in impenetrable darkness."⁹

There is the problem, the only problem, the problem of the one thing needful. In this relentless dependence how can we explain to ourselves this obligation to belong to ourselves? How, since we are—and since we are aware of it—dependent upon a source of life which manifests itself in our life without our having willed it, can we satisfy the insistent demand of autonomy; how can we be for ourselves, be ourselves, and even surpass ourselves? Said Père Laberthonnière one day, "It is no longer a question of bringing things back to us; rather it is a question of bringing ourselves to that which surpasses us and upon which we are dependent."¹⁰

Once more, there is the problem, the essential problem which is set for man.

The only solution which corresponds to the data,

⁹ *Thoughts*, § 427.

¹⁰ *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, February, 1909, p. 65.

as I shall point out from now on, is that at the very source of our life stands God, not any sort of God, but a God of love and of goodness. God is the solution of the problem which is set in each of us.

III

Is this actually the solution? Indeed, many are they who question it. But, first of all, is it necessary that there be a solution? I am aware of the objections from this angle which many are disposed to offer.¹¹

Surely, they will say, we discover in ourselves what you discover in yourselves, but is it rationally necessary that this dependence and this insistent demand of autonomy correspond to something? That it is *desirable* that a man find at the source of his life a supreme being on whom he can support his own being, we freely recognize. But is this sufficient to *prove* that there is such a one?

You will observe, gentlemen, that the mere desire thus expressed bespeaks, if not the recognition, at least the presentiment of an *ought to be* which makes its presence felt in what we are. And whence comes this desire? You will say, it is an ideal that it is consonant with the nature of the human mind

¹¹I have not myself phrased the objections given below. I have heard them many times, particularly in that course of meetings to which I alluded in the previous lecture and of which we shall have in the present one a new echo.

to see a gradual development therein. Yet is it not necessary to account for the presence of this ideal in you? How is it that there arises thus in man an ideal which appeals to the better in him? We are always brought back to this question.

And then, who will realize this ideal? Not you, since not admitting God and refusing to take him as the supreme end of your life you confine your destiny to the ephemeral existence which you live on earth and resign yourselves soon to disappear forever along with the ideal which, nevertheless, will have caused your heart to leap.

Will those who will come after you realize it more fully than you? But who guarantees to you that the men who will come after you will have the same ideal as you? It seems, indeed, that with many others you are victims of a strange illusion—the illusion of the inevitable and fatal progress of humanity, of the human mind, of the human ideal. What gives you the right to believe that the humanity of tomorrow will have a nobler and purer ideal than that of today? And indeed where do you get the right to affirm that there will be a humanity tomorrow and forever? Let us suppose, however, that you are right and that on this earth there is an unending succession of men. Do you not see that no one will ever realize the ideal which he will bear about within him? Always on the point of

being swallowed up in nothingness along with their dream, their individual existence will appear to them as a medium which does its share, perhaps, in working for a goal which they will never know. In the last analysis are you not condemning us to the punishment of Tantalus together with those of mankind who precede us and those who must follow?

Well and good, other of our interlocutors will say. Let us admit that a solution ought to be given to the problem you have raised. Can it not have others than the one you are pointing out?

What are they, gentlemen? Ah, I know that some, through the outward appearances which individualize them, pretend to discover that they are but a part of the absolute. "Creatures of a day who struggle for an hour" in a world which remains the same eternally, they appease their unrest and think to escape their dependence by pondering, for a moment, the universal! Or indeed, accepting the fact of existing only through the good pleasure of some sort of God of might who can love and desire himself alone, they abandon themselves to this divine despotism which undoubtedly purposes ends which they will never know. In such an attitude, I ask you, are they doing anything save *submitting*? in this are they satisfying the obligation of being themselves and of belonging to themselves?

Others are persuaded that man will finally succeed in triumphing over his dependence. Let him penetrate the laws of phenomena, let him succeed in surprising the very secret of life, let the physicists and the chemists tame the forces of nature; then the world upon which we are today dependent will be at our service!

Very good! But during the last centuries have we not seen humanity laboring to woo the forces of nature and to place them at its service? What has this gigantic effort resulted in? Is its result a gaining possession of the world, a real mastery of man over things? Rather, are there not things which encroach and throttle human personality?¹² We have passionately desired to enslave the visible world and we are still possessed by it more than we possess it.

There, gentlemen, is the profound significance of the history of the modern world. Man thought he could do without God and conquer visible things by himself alone, but "man without God ceases to be man."¹³ It is useless for him to spend and destroy his creative forces in self-affirmation while gravitating on the periphery of things; because he has broken with the spiritual center of life, he has broken away from the depths and has come to the surface. In the superficiality to which he condemns

¹² Cf. Foerster, *le Christ et la vie humaine*, Paris, 1924, p. 29.

¹³ Berdiaeff, *Un nouveau moyen-âge*, Paris, 1927, p. 69.

himself, he ends in wasting himself and in losing even the faith which he had put in himself. "The attitude of man without God and against God," the philosopher Berdiaeff writes, "the negation of the image and resemblance of God in man lead to man's negation and destruction."¹⁴ A severe verdict this, to which Jacques Chevalier holds, exclaiming, "He who does away with personality in God necessarily does away with it in man, for the one guarantees the other."¹⁵

And, in spite of everything, in order to solve the problem which obtrudes itself upon him in his conscience, let man deny haughtily his dependence and affirm his autonomy, let him proclaim with a hero of Dostoievski, "If God does not exist, all depends on me and I am bound to affirm my independence," what folly is he not swept into? Substituting himself for God and fancying that he is God; he seeks, perhaps for a long while, for the attribute of his divinity and ends in finding it; the attribute of his divinity is his independence.

But, like Kiriloff the Russian writer, he finds, when all is done, only one way in which to affirm his independence, and that is suicide. "I shall kill myself," said Kiriloff, "to affirm my insubordina-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 19.

¹⁵ J. Chevalier, *Bergson*, p. 14 [E. T., p. 14].

tion, my terrible and new freedom."¹⁶ Is that really possessing one's self, being one's self, and, still more, surpassing one's self?

You see, gentlemen, that the different solutions which we have considered lead us to an impasse in which we continue with our sense of dependence and the insistent demand of being and of realizing ourselves which we have so clearly ascertained in the depths of our consciousness.

IV

A single path remains open for us: to recognize at the very source of our life a God who, because he is love and goodness, wills us for our own sakes and brings us into existence in order that taking our start from what he gives us of his own being we may become fully and willingly the men we ought to be.

Let us not weary of repeating it: At the source of our life we do not place a God who creates because of a peculiar faculty of his nature, that is, of necessity, nor a God who would bring us into existence for the sole purpose of manifesting his glory. No longer do we place there a God who, imposing himself from without, would render it impossible for us not to believe in him. With such a God we

¹⁶ See J. Maritain, "Dialogues" in *le Roseau d'or*, sixth number of the *Chronicles*, Paris, 1928, pp. 42 f.

would be dependent, surely, but we would never realize ourselves, we would never live in ourselves. Now we wish to be, we ought to be.

Our only value lies in our infinite desire for life. God, the source of true life, is the sole object of our desire. We thirst after life, consequently for something which is in us and is at the same time more than we. We will ourselves, but by the very act of willing ourselves we will another than ourselves. How would we desire him with such intensity were he not in some way ourselves?

"From desire," remarks Fallot, "the notion of unity bursts out into plurality. Some one is in me simply because he is another than I; consequently some one by penetrating me completes me and becomes an integral part of me simply by remaining himself.

"I depend upon the object of my desire; to desire is to fall into dependence upon the object we desire. I can not live without this object. But since the perfect object of desire is some one who makes an integral part of me simply by staying himself, by desiring him I desire myself. Dependence ends in freedom since we can not lay hold of God without laying hold of ourselves."¹⁷

"The immanency of the action of God allows us

¹⁷ *La Vie et la Pensée*, vol. ii, p. 382.

to affirm that God by his action is more intimately present in man than man is present in himself."¹⁸

"Thou art in me," St. Augustine prayed one day, "but I am far from thee."

And Pascal, in his turn, wrote, "We must love a being who is in us, and is not ourselves; and that is true of each and all men. Now only the Universal Being is such. The kingdom of God is within us; the universal good is within us, is ourselves—and not ourselves."¹⁹

Thus, gentlemen, "God presents himself to us as generosity, as goodness, as charity who wills the beings which we are in and for themselves and gives himself to them in order to bring them into existence and to cause them to live eternally; so that, if it is only by giving themselves to him that they in their turn attain their end and escape, it is theirs to decide whether to give themselves or to refuse."²⁰

To know this God, to recognize him in ourselves, we ought—we have already pointed out—to free ourselves from common knowledge, to withdraw ourselves from the midst of visible things, and renouncing putting ourselves as the center to triumph over our egotism—in short, we ought to love. But how should we reach this liberation, how should we

¹⁸ J. Chevalier, *Trois Conférences d'Oxford*, p. 32.

¹⁹ *Thoughts*, § 485.

²⁰ Laberthonnière, *Bulletin* . . . , (May-June, 1925), p. 56.

be able to love, were we not stirred from within ourselves to the life of love by a living and vivifying love? And if to know what it is essential for us to know for our life to have meaning we have to renounce ourselves and to love, it is because that which we must know is *per se* love and goodness. Only love has the power and the right to call forth and demand love.

Furthermore, in his living and infinite generosity God is always above what we are by what we have already learned from knowing him, but in such a way that his infinite life and charity, by the gift which he himself is making for the purpose of bringing us into existence and of enabling us to live, are always shared by us and always live in us in order that we may be able to grow into them.²¹

It is because God is thus more truly present in us than we are in ourselves, that Pascal could say, "Man infinitely transcends man,"²² and that he could add, "Man is not worthy of God, but he is not incapable of being made worthy."²³

So then, we have been born in order that we may realize ourselves, but through realizing in ourselves the Being upon whom we are dependent and without whom our life could never have any value and

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68 f.

²² *Thoughts*, § 434.

²³ *Ibid.*, § 510.

who introduces into our dependent existence a presence and an action which surpass it and who assigns to us an end which we ought to lay hold of and pursue freely as our end. And this is possible for us only because we do depend upon a love which wills us in and for ourselves. Here is a dependence no longer submitted to, but freely accepted. "A man does not submit to what he loves," Père Laberthonnière further remarked, "when the love of that which he loves is precisely that to which he owes his origin and life."

And yet, it will be said, is this God of whom you speak really outside us? Is not his transcendence an illusion?

Is not this question born of a misunderstanding?

"It is commonly supposed," Maurice Blondel recently remarked, "that a transcendent reality can only be conceived as something external and anterior in time and space, to which it would be necessary to *revert*, whereas it is a question of complying with it as with a perpetual and inexhaustible innovation, *going forward* as a result of foresight and spiritual advancement."²⁴ To this remark the following observation of Jacques Chevalier is properly subjoined, "In the realm of reality we have contrasted immanent and transcendent as we would contrast outside and inside in space; with the result

²⁴ *L'itinéraire philosophique de Maurice Blondel*, p. 218.

that the transcendent would of necessity be separated from the subject if it is distinct from it or the immanent would of necessity be identical with the subject if it is present with it. Thus the only choice is between philosophical separatism and pantheism, between a God who is alien to man or a God who is merged with him. But says Pascal, 'God is at once within us and without us.'²⁵

No, gentlemen, God is not a subjective creation or projection of our ideal into a fancied transcendence. Undoubtedly he exists for us and in us only when our whole being has taken the step, for which nothing can be substituted. But he can exist for us and in us because he exists in himself.

If God were only immanent how would it be possible that there could ever be in us anything more than that which is there already? It is because God, simply by being in us, is infinitely above us that his action ceaselessly urges us to surpass ourselves so as to raise ourselves to him. The need and the thirst for God which we discover within us does not come from us. If their source were in us, how, when we try to appease this thirst, would we be so utterly powerless?

God can be immanent only because he is transcendent. And the immanental approach, further-

²⁵ *Trois Conférences d'Oxford*, p. 49.

more, can end only in the doctrine of a transcendent God.

Again well and good, some will agree, but save for the rather general affirmation of the love and goodness of God is not this God of whom you speak to us unknowable?

Incomprehensible? Yes, gentlemen; God is that. This means that philosophy will never be able to grasp him in his plenitude, to *comprehend* all that he is and all that he does, and that here on earth we have never finished knowing him.

But for the type of metaphysics which we are considering today God is not this unknown of whom certain philosophers or theologians tell us that we can know only what he is not.

"Knowledge is the consciousness of action," said Jacob Böhme. Thus we know God by his action and his presence in us; we know him as the source and end of our life; and accordingly, since we know both God and ourselves, we can gain a real knowledge of the world. To know God is, by the one stroke, to open our minds to his truth regarding ourselves and the world.

There is another point. If we have to unite ourselves to God by the very step which results in our recognizing him within us, we can infer from that fact that our thought is of a piece with his thought.

Our thought tends irresistibly to the truth because our whole being has its source in a God who has imposed himself upon us as truth from the time when we first began to know him. But this solidarity which binds our thought to the thought of God establishes the reality of the object of our knowledge. If God is truth, the God in whom we think causes us to think what is true, and the object of our knowledge, even if it can not be bounded, is no less certain.

I add that we know God as a person. Surely we are aware of all the difficulties which the notion of personality raises, when it is applied to the infinite God. Does not saying that God is a person place upon him the limitations by which every personality is defined? Does it not introduce contradiction into the notion of God which we have? Lachelier said one day, "I would hesitate to say that God is a person, unless it were by a sort of symbolism. . . ." ²⁶ But how should we do without the symbolism of personality when we attempt to represent the Being in whom and through whom we recognize that we are called to realize ourselves, that is, in the profoundest sense of the word, to become persons! "We can form an idea of the supreme will which creates, unifies, and coördinates the world," Foerster justly

²⁶ *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, February, 1909, p. 68.

remarks, "in no other way than under the image of what in us comes and establishes unity and order in the chaos within. . . . An impersonal God would be below man; the cause would be less than the effect, and consequently the creature would rise above its creator. All thought which infers the existence of God ought of necessity to end in the affirmation of a personal God."²⁷

We have now, gentlemen, reached the end of the study which we had purposed for today. Once more we are brought face to face with a God who created us, but a God who created us in love, who wills us for ourselves, who is the being of our being, the life of our life, the consciousness of our consciousness. Do you understand now the profound import of the torment of God? Deep within our life there is awakened a confused longing which tends toward the perfect life. But instead of seeking the perfection of life in voluntary concord with the source upon which we are dependent, we think we find it in the possession and enjoyment of visible things, especially all the treasures of Thought and Art, of which, if they are separated from God, we can only experience an ephemeral and consequently imperfect possession. And so, within ourselves are born these discords and contradictions, these aspirations which

²⁷ Foerster, *Le Christ et la Vie humaine*, p. 66.

do not resign themselves to being always repelled, this unrest and torment for which God alone, not endured but accepted as the source and end of our life, can provide an effective answer and relief. "God," wrote Solovieff, "is an inward truth which we are morally bound to accept freely."²⁸ It is the acceptance of this truth which alone explains to man why he is a being who *ought to surpass himself*. God, the God of love, is the one in whom we must believe if we wish to give meaning to our life. "The creature is explained only through the creator."²⁹

A mystery! perhaps you will say. Yes, a mystery, but one which casts a glorious light over what we are and ought to be. Instead of the nothingness disguised in more or less seductive semblances which some are offering for our choice as we stand confronted by this mystery, I prefer for my part the mystery by the clear light of which I glimpse that I am a man only because at the root of my humanity there is the act of a God of love. "What does this mean save that man's calling is to live in God for God?"

That was the way Boutroux phrased it as he summarized the philosophy of his teacher, Lachelier.³⁰

²⁸ Quoted by Schwob, *Moi Juif*, p. 353.

²⁹ J. Chevalier, *Trois Conférences d'Oxford*, p. 33.

³⁰ *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 1921, p. 18.

But are we still in the province of philosophy? Have we not already crossed the frontier which divides philosophy from religion? When Charles Secrétan in his ascent toward God, whom he identified with absolute freedom, discovered in himself Absolute Love he was aware of the fact that he was dealing with metaphysics and not theology. Let us here repeat with Boutroux that "all philosophy which does not end in religion is abstract and formal, silly aspiration or a mad, unreasonable, and insistent demand of thought. It is in God and in him alone that being, movement, and life are found in their reality and plenitude. We can cease from willing ourselves only if God condescends to will himself in us."³¹

"The grandeur of metaphysics," said Jacques Maritain, "is that it awakes the desire for supreme union, for a spiritual possession consummated in the very order of reality. But its misery is that it can not satisfy it."³²

No, the God of the philosophers and scholars, if he is at the end of the road along which our thought ascends and if he satisfies the insistent demand which we bear about within us of discovering the source of our life, can not quench our thirst for God.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "Grandeur et misère de la métaphysique" in *Roseau d'Or*, No. 5, pp. 156 f.

It is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ who alone can give us this relief. Not that we are driven to choose the one or the other as some philosophers wish to inform us,³³ but because neither the scholars nor the philosophers can reveal to us, as he wishes it done, the living God who reveals himself to our souls by giving himself to them to quicken them. From now on we shall ask this living God to make himself known to us.

³³ Cf. Brunschvicg, "la Querelle de l'athéisme," in the *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, March 24, 1928.

"God, Not of the Philosophers and Scholars"

YOU REMEMBER, GENTLEMEN, THE FIRST LINES of the *Memorial* of Pascal to which I made allusion at the close of our last study. On the night of November 23, 1654, when for long months he had been carrying about within him a torment of God which nothing had as yet appeased, as he was meditating on the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John, Pascal had an inward illumination, indicated by the word *Fire* put before the words, known by all, of which I shall recall only the first few:

*God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not
of the philosophers and scholars.*

Certainty, Certainty, Feeling, Joy, Peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

Pascal, philosopher and scholar, had known long since the God whom human reason reaches at the origin of the universe and of life, at the source of the order of visible things and of human thought, and in the very finality to which universal life bears witness. But also long since he had proved the in-

effectualness of metaphysical proofs of God for a great number of men. "The metaphysical proofs of God," he wrote, "are so remote from the reasoning of men, and so complicated, that they make little impression; and if they should be of service to some, it would be only during the moment that they see such demonstration; but an hour afterwards they fear they have been mistaken."¹

And furthermore, "it is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason";² here lies the certainty which illumines the mind and soul of Pascal on the night of his definitive conversion. From this time on he knows that there is a knowledge of God sure and certain in its own right, and how much richer and more efficacious than acquirable reason, and this is the knowledge which God gives of himself. God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ has revealed himself, and his revelation brings to man's torment the one and only answer—itself a deliverer—which can satisfy it.

God has revealed himself! But what is this revelation? To whom has it been directed? Under what form? For what end? What is its content? Such are the questions which we have to answer today.

¹ *Thoughts*, § 543.

² *Ibid.*, § 278.

I

God has revealed himself. He has given of himself knowledge which men would not have been able to have acquired by themselves. He has given it freely, that is, he was not forced by virtue of his nature to the necessity of revealing himself. The revelation manifests God's freedom. Not that it bears the mark of some sort of divine caprice. Quite the contrary, God subjected revelation, as he did all his works, to laws, the knowledge of which it is possible to acquire. But it remains no less a product of his free grace, and by that fact alone it constitutes a miracle. We understand by that, not as some ill-informed minds persist in believing a violation of natural laws—which latter indeed express only our own representation of the order which God set in things—but a free intervention of God modifying the natural course of things by opposing to the effects of certain laws the effects of other laws and making them lead to certain ends. From this point of view the revelation which God gave of himself proclaims the freedom of God. God revealed himself because he willed to reveal himself. The divine revelation is an act of divine will.

But to whom did God reveal himself? To men in whom he implanted this ineradicable will to live which we have already signalized. Man wills to live.

By an instinctive movement he seeks outside himself the fullness of life which he does not find within him. But in what form does the life which man seeks outside himself present itself except in the form of the image? The image is the primordial element to which, for man, that which is not his is reduced. The universe comes to him in the form of an image. The image is the prime mover of sensibility, of will, and of intelligence. It is the vibrant expression of the mysterious and superior reality which is life. It is, for man, the sacrament of life.

"The image," Fallot pointed out, "is the irreducible element of representation; it signifies that everything which is tends to reveal itself. Whence comes its might save from the part it constantly plays in announcing and communicating life?"³

If then men have received a revelation which God was pleased to give them of himself, they have been able to grasp it only through images. And we discern at once that the images in which men have seen God's revelation come to them could be only those which the development of their sensibility and intelligence, the spectacle of nature, and their knowledge of themselves placed at their disposal. This fundamental fact is to be borne in mind; certain of its consequences will soon appear.

Another remark of no less importance is in place

³ *La Vie et la Pensée de T. Fallot*, vol. ii, p. 316.

here. Man is not qualified to receive a revelation of God, regardless of what sort of man he is—simply because he is a man. God can not reveal himself to carnal men so long as they are enslaved to visible things. He can not reveal himself to the proud who idolizes himself and takes himself as the very goal of his life and is as a consequence incapable of hearkening to any voice save his own. He can not reveal himself to the egotist who in his unconcern for other than his own personal interests and in his failure to see in other men anything other than tools to serve his own ambitions condemns himself to being unable to emerge from self so as to enter into contact with concerns other than his own. He can reveal himself no longer to those who center all their attention on phenomena and their concatenation and thus make themselves the prisoners of their resolve not to seek beyond phenomena for the reality which the phenomena manifest. Only men of intuition are qualified to receive the revelations of God, because they alone are able to be inspired by him. Inspiration, intuition, revelation—these are but three aspects of the same reality, three moments of the same divine action. Perhaps it may not be without value at this point to define a few terms a bit more precisely.

What is inspiration? For the moment, let us merely say that it always implies the meeting and

contact of two minds, one of which inspires the other which is inspired. When God once wills to make himself known to men, as a prelude to his revelatory act he awakes and excites in them the desire to seek him. Then when the mind of man makes answer to the first overtures of the mind of God, inspiration become possible. "When thou saidst, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Eternal, will I seek."⁴

Inspiration gradually—at times suddenly—renders the man inspired capable of grasping intuitively the revelation of God. What the carnal man and the philosopher and the scholar can neither see nor hear the man inspired is rendered capable of seeing and hearing. That which never entered into the heart of the natural man God reveals to him. The one inspired thus becomes the coworker of God. Through him God suffers himself to be seen and understood to a degree. Revelation is the fulfillment of inspiration.

"Certainty, certainty," said Pascal. And the apostle Paul, honored long before Pascal with divine revelations, also had exclaimed, "I am certain . . ." From intuition itself which grasps the revelation of God the one inspired gains a sense of certainty which nothing can disturb. It is not merely his feeling which is set in motion by the revelation of God nor

⁴ Psalm 27:8.

his will which is *driven* by God; his living thought is illumined and grasps in the revelation the intellectual element and the doctrinal element without which the believer's life would forever remain in disorder. "To live without doctrine is impossible," Fallot pointed out, "because to live without doctrine would be to live without a rudder." "There is certainty only where there is full consciousness, and there is full consciousness only where thought has assumed control. Not that certainty implies rationality; I often attain certainty through intuition. But certainty implies explicit and positive belief in which thought as well as heart concurs."⁵

Do we not have here the echo of this other thought of Pascal: "We know truth, not only by the reason but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles. . . . We know that we do not dream, and however impossible it is for us to prove it by reason, this inability demonstrates only the weakness of our reason, but not the uncertainty of all our knowledge. . . . This inability ought, then, to serve only to humble reason, which would judge all, but not to impugn our certainty, as if only reason were capable of instructing us."⁶

⁵ *La Vie et la Pensée* . . . , vol. ii, p. 404.

⁶ *Thoughts*, § 282.

II

It is not enough to demonstrate the *how* of revelation. In addition to that it is important to make a careful statement of the *why*.

To what end did God reveal himself to men? To give a different sort of knowledge of himself than that which the exercise of reason or the presentiments of their consciences provide them with? Most certainly. God has secrets which it is impossible for a man to surprise. If we believe in God, we cannot suppose that we can know anything about him either against, or even without, his will. All we shall know will be what he is pleased to tell us and show us.⁷

But if God willed to make himself known to men through a revelation of himself, it was at the same time to bring them to a knowledge of themselves. To the revelation of God there corresponds a revelation of man who sees and knows and judges himself in the clear light of the divine revelation. For men to know themselves means to know themselves in their wretchedness, in their state of separation from God, even more, in their state of hostility toward God, in a word, in their sin. But it is also for men to discover in this divine revelation, which is grasped

⁷ William Temple, *The Faith and Modern Thought*, London, 1924, pp. 32 f.

by an inspiration which wells up from deep within them, God's call to them to enter into a new relationship with him. Knowing themselves to be sinners, it is for them to discover that they themselves are "capable of God," as St. Augustine said, called by God to discover him in order that they may know him, may possess him, and be united with him. And consequently it is to see surging up within one's self a more acute contradiction than the one the seriousness of which I just now pointed out. We are concerned here with much more than the conflict between our insistent demand for autonomy and our thoroughgoing dependence with regard to things and the means of life; we are concerned here with the tragic clash between the sinful men that we are and the men, participating in the very life of God, that God calls us to become, by the sheer fact that he makes himself known to us. How can we fail to see, furthermore, that knowledge implies interpenetration of minds, and consequently love?

Accordingly, let us learn to gain a better understanding of inspiration whereby contact is established between the mind of God and the mind of man. "It is," wrote Fallot, "the taking possession of the soul by another who causes it to regain itself once more, so that it is aware that it is its own while belonging completely to another. By defining inspiration as 'a source of new activity which per-

suades the soul to action but does not constrain it thereto' love is made the substance itself of inspiration. Indeed, terror crushes, fear constrains, passion enslaves, love alone sets free and enables freedom of action. To be aware that I am inspired I must be aware of myself, but at the same time outside myself in the power of a greater than I who possesses the keys to myself more truly than do I. The one inspired possesses himself and knows he is possessed; he is he, but he is another. Nevertheless, this other, in whose power he finds himself, who envelops him and who penetrates him, respects him and wishes him to be himself."⁸

Thus God reveals himself to men to cause them to know themselves by knowing him but also to wish themselves such as he wills. This action of God on and through the inner life restores men to themselves by causing them to lay hold once again in God of the source of their life. "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."⁹ God makes himself known to men to inspire them to take themselves in hand, to try to make themselves such as they discover God calls them to become, and to become in his power what they are, despite their wretchedness and present sins, in accordance with the designs of eternal Love.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 403.

⁹ Romans 8:16.

Is this all? Not yet. If by the revelation of himself which he gives to men God causes them to find again in their inmost depths the image of their Creator and furthermore leads them to the certainty that they were created in the image of God, it is for the purpose of revealing himself through them. The men to whom God has revealed himself ought in their turn to become revealers. And this is congenial to the laws of the spiritual dynamic. The ones inspired incarnate in their words, in their deeds, and above all in their most intimate feelings, spiritual energies which as a result of the contact of the Spirit of God with their spirit penetrate their sensibility and will. Those who live near them sustain their influence directly, but the indirect influence which they exert is often profound as well and how much more far reaching! Along with the memory of the words and deeds of the great inspired men are transmitted from generation to generation and from age to age the divine forces the fruits of which have been these deeds and words. Let men who bear within them the presentiment of spiritual realities come into contact with these figures through the record, very ancient, perhaps, of what they said or did, and straightway the divine Spirit, incarnate in the teaching or the action of the one inspired, manifests its ever-living energy and reveals to the souls a-thirst for life something of the truth of God. It is

thus that the field of action of those to whom God has revealed himself that they in turn may reveal him broadens without limit.

From these few indications it becomes clear that for the revelation which God willed to give to men to attain its purpose it has been obliged to assume a pedagogical rôle. And this explains why from the outset the revelation of God could be neither evident nor perfectly known to men.

The revelation of God, ever perfectly true to form and complete in itself, we have said, can be grasped only by inspired men. Now inspiration assumes infinitely different degrees dependent upon the comparative crudeness or delicacy of the man's spiritual medium. Hence the necessity for God to educate man, to develop and to refine little by little in man the feeling for spiritual reality which offers itself to him.

Moreover, however potent the inspiration of God may be, it lays hold of sinful men—we are not speaking today of Jesus Christ—that is, men who by their fallen state are rendered unfit to assimilate a revelation perfect from its very beginning. An English thinker observes on this point that "God may be before a man in all the beauty of holiness, and the man not be able to understand it, not have the faculties for perceiving it. And that is how it is

that in the beginning of the Revelation everything is crude, a great deal is even wrong; not because God has deceived the man, but because the man has not yet the faculty for understanding."¹⁰ Furthermore in the childhood of the race how could it have been possible for those inspired to have understood a perfect revelation of God? No more than the child is qualified during the early years of life to understand the complete revelation which its mother would desire to give it of herself.

It is only through a patient and persevering education that God rendered the men, to whom he meant to reveal himself, qualified spiritually and morally to receive the divine revelation as the force whereby they are called to live. That men might not only understand what God willed to reveal to them of himself and of themselves but that they might become revealers thereof it was necessary that this revelation becomes flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood. That this might be so, to what misunderstanding, to what abasement, was not God compelled to resign himself? The history of revelation is the history of a God who accepts having his thought deformed, his character travestied, his ambitions maimed, and the knowledge which he wills to give of himself narrowed to the size of sinful and

¹⁰ W. Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

crude man, and who, nevertheless, with indefatigable patience pursues his task of revealing.

I said above that the revelation of God could reach the spirit and the heart of man only through images which they could borrow solely from their affective and intellectual development, from their knowledge of the world, and from their experience with life. But in addition to the fact that "the imagination is always materialistic"¹¹ you know doubtlessly that men in the childhood of the race have at their disposal only childish images and that carnal men utilize only carnal images, often crude and bearing the marks and blots of sin. Nevertheless, God has been forced from the very first to permit his revelation to be enveloped in images of this sort. In certain circles men are scandalized at what they call anthropomorphisms, that is, representations of God which men make for themselves in their own image and in the image of their passions, of the world in which they live, and of nature, which is for them a great book of images behind which they catch glimpses of realities, some beneficent, others formidable. Without these anthropomorphisms the human soul would never have been able to grasp a revelation of God. And furthermore, are they not always inevitable in one form or another? Do we

¹¹ The expression is Edouard Le Roy's.

not always represent to ourselves the divine and eternal reality by means of human images or concepts, in terms of men and their behavior?

To be sure, in every stage of history we encounter images which distort and travesty the revelation which God wills to give of himself. But through the agency of his spirit God toils ceaselessly to purify the images with which men envelop sacred reality. Remember Elijah, one of the first great prophets of Israel. On the day following his encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, in discouragement Elijah withdrew to the cave of Horeb. God shows him that he wills to reveal himself to him. The prophet leaves the cave. A strong wind makes him tremble; Elijah knows by intuition that God is not in the wind. An earthquake shakes the ground beneath the prophet's feet; God is not in the earthquake. Fire from heaven dazzles Elijah's eyes; God is not in the fire. Then the prophet perceives a sound of gentle stillness; he knows that God is there.¹² What patience and perseverance was not the living God compelled to have that human consciousness might be rendered capable of grasping the divine revelation, no longer in the uproar of the forces of nature but in the still voice which comes to caress the wearied soul and to help it to belief in invisible tenderness!

¹² I Kings 19.

But even when imperfect images by necessity distorted and travestied the perfect revelation, they served, none the less, to proclaim the life of God and to awaken in the hearts of those who knew the desire and often the torment of God the hope that an answer was afforded them and that through this answer the meaning of their life would be revealed to them.

It would be possible to show to what a profound experience, for example, the image of God's wrath corresponds, which perhaps troubles and scandalizes us when we encounter it in the preaching of the prophets of Israel or in the letters of St. Paul. What does it express other than the conviction of sinful man, to whom the tragic seriousness of his sin has just been revealed together with the absoluteness of the divine holiness, that in the face of human disobedience, rebellion, and idolatry God must affirm his holiness with a force which compels men to enter once again into themselves, to accept the curse which smites the sin, and to long for deliverance?

III

We have just seen how and why God reveals himself. But what is the content of the revelation? Do not we who are Christians say that we find it in the Bible? Yes, indeed, but it is necessary to state more precisely what we mean by that. Here again I must

remember that all which has to do with the Gospel is reserved for the last discussion.

To whom do we owe the Bible? To God first of all; then to those inspired men to whom he revealed himself and who became his revealers; finally to the men, inspired or not, who put in written form the record of the lives of those inspired, or who preserved their teachings, and who gathered together or assembled their writings. Without raising the question anew of the respect which is to be shown to the freedom of the one inspired, which every definition of inspiration implies, it is sufficient to make clear that God's agency, however essential it may be in the history of revelation, can not preserve from purely human errors the men whom he inspires and, still less, those who preserve the record or the words of inspired men.

Accordingly, let us not look in the Bible for what God does not will to show us there. It is neither a book of science, nor even—in the sense in which we ordinarily understand this term—a book of history. Science it ignores. I shall give one example of this—the first pages of Genesis. When it relates to us the creation of the world, the appearance of life, the beginnings of mankind, man's separation from God through sin, and man's separation from man through murderous egotism, the Bible has no intention at all of giving us a scientific description or a

critical account designed to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. In a cosmogony similar in nature to other Oriental cosmogonies it envelops the great and sovereign revelatory affirmations which God caused to resound in Israel's consciousness. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . ; God made man in his own image . . . ; sinful man is not simply a victim, he is guilty as well.

History? Without doubt the Bible relates to us a history, and how moving and glorious a one it is! Nevertheless, it relates it not for its own sake, but because of the religious significance with which it is freighted. The value of history consists solely in the revelatory affirmations which the facts in one way or another sustain, in its doctrinal and even metaphysical import, in the revelation which, having been granted to men and being bound to be transmitted by men, had of necessity to be inserted in an historic texture which it is ever transcending.

What, then, should we look for in the Bible? The revelation which God gives us through those whom he constituted his agents of revelation. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, the psalmists—men. And what sort of men? Often extremely wretched, sharing all the imperfections, all the wretchedness, and all the defilements of sinful humanity. And yet God calls them through his own free choice to enter, one after another, the formida-

ble adventure after which he wills that humanity take possession of the perfect life. At times the divine light illumines their path. In all that strikes their eye they see the sign of the divine reality for which God has given them a homesick longing. Yes, truly, for them "the heavens declare the glory of God," but so do the little child and the sweet-smelling flower. Thus for those inspired the least phenomenon becomes the prophet of the living God. But at times also it seems as if God escapes their quest; they see no more than brutal nature, wicked and cruel men, enjoying their sin. Ah, it is easy to see that in such hours they should have cried out, "Thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel."¹³ And then little by little the veil is removed; new light shines in their heart. Even more than Baudelaire invoking death could they not have said, addressing themselves to God:

If heaven and earth are black as ink,
Our hearts which thou dost know are filled with sun-
beams.¹⁴

How necessary it would be to let you know in some detail these heralds of the divine revelation! A Moses, infusing into the still half-savage tribes of Israel the consciousness of a national unity indissolubly linked to their common faith in the God

¹³ Isaiah 45:15.

¹⁴ *Le Voyage*.

whose prophet conveyed to them the revelation. An Amos, seized by the Spirit of God amid his herd at Tekoa, becoming the preacher of divine justice and, long centuries before Luther, proclaiming, in the face of a ritualism enslaved to the temporal power, the sovereign rights of religious consciousness. A Hosea, unraveling through the sad web of his life the revelation of a God who is not simply the God of justice, but who is also the God of love and mercy. An Isaiah, prostrate in contemplation of the holiness of God, in the presence of which he becomes aware of the magnitude of his sin and of the free gift of the divine pardon, and, by a magnificent anticipation of faith, announcing the decisive triumph of peace among men too long stained with blood by war.

In addition to these, how many others among the great inspired figures of the Bible should be made to live before your eyes, had we the time! Let us limit ourselves to the simple mention of the essential features of revelation which they incarnated in their teaching and in their activity.

In the first place it is the revelation of the humanity of God. Not, indeed, that the inspired men of the Bible do not proclaim the transcendence of God. Quite the reverse; the more distinct the revelation becomes, the more the living God appears infinitely above man and all that man can conceive

about him. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," he reveals to one of his prophets.¹⁵ Yet God is near, very near, to man. Nothing which is human is foreign to him. "God and man," said a great Christian of the last century, "are two of a kind (*deux semblables*) who have lost themselves and who are seeking themselves."¹⁶ There indeed is the God of the Bible whose transcendence no more veils his humanity than his humanity veils his transcendence.

God's humanity, but also man's divine call. The man who is such as the Spirit of God teaches him to realize he is makes out deep within his soul stained by sin the title deeds of his divine nobility. He belongs to God by right of birth. Sin, accordingly, is contrary to the true nature of man. It is God's intention that this true nature be reestablished. But that this may take place man must consent to suffering, a remedy contrary to nature but the only remedy for the state which is also contrary to nature to which man has been reduced by sin. By suffering and by suffering alone can man respond to his divine call, for he can come to participate in the very life of God—again to take another phrase of St. Augustine's—only provided he be willing to be freed from slavery to visible things, to die to his egotism

¹⁵ Isaiah 55:8.

¹⁶ Christophe Dieterlen.

and his pride, to be born in suffering to the life of faith and obedience to God.¹⁷

There reduced to its essential features is the revelation which quite outside the Gospel the Bible brings to us.

And that is why its authority increases from century to century. Not an enslaving authority of the letter which must be accepted without understanding. An authority of a spirit which, inspiring our spirit, causes us to discern in the Bible, and gladly welcome, a liberating message. An authority which wills to lead us to freedom and which makes us truly free when, giving it free access, we present ourselves "through humiliations to inspirations," and, receiving in what we are the revelation of what God is calling us to be, we resolutely enter the road upon which men find themselves sons of God.

IV

So now you see what an error those commit who pretend that through submitting to the authority of the revelation which the Bible transmits to us we fetter ourselves to a dead text, to a book which belongs to the past.

Doubtlessly, as we shall see in our next study, the Bible offers us in Christ a revelation of God which

¹⁷ On this point cf. Fallot, *Le Livre de l'Action bonne*, Paris, 1905, pp. 362 ff.

cannot be surpassed. But is it not Christ himself who told his disciples that the Spirit would guide them into all the truth,¹⁸ and did not St. Paul point out repeatedly that even after being perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ God ceaselessly pursues his work of revelation? He is concerned to reveal to the Church and through the Church to mankind the deep meaning of the advent, the life, the sufferings, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. He is concerned to reveal, to the extent he has deemed wise, the nature of the relations which unite Christ to the Father and the riches of the intra-divine life, the ineffable beauty of which he allows us to glimpse through Christ. He is concerned, as the Church finds itself confronted by new problems, to reveal from him the way it should strive to solve them, and what God's thought concerning them is. He is concerned, when Christian conscience and thought experience so keen an anguish from the impact with painful realities, to reveal to them the secret of the certainties which appease the worst torments. Unceasing revelation which discloses in the perfect revelation of the Gospel riches which are ever new. Revelation which God grants from age to age to those who, inspired by him, can be honored by his real and actual revelations only to the extent that their whole being

¹⁸ John 16:13.

suffers itself to be penetrated, purified, and transformed by the revelation of the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus Christ himself. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

But I sense in certain minds a hesitation struggling for expression to which, before I close, I wish to try to make answer.

"You have told us," perhaps you will say to me, "of a God who revealed himself in a definite place and at one definite moment in history; of the God who revealed himself to the children of Israel and through the children of Israel. But has the rest of mankind—the other peoples—remained unacquainted with the action of God?"

No, gentlemen, God's activity was not restricted to one place or to one limited period of human history. Everywhere that man lives God is active. Doubtlessly God has met resistance which, out of respect for that freedom which he wills to develop in man, he has felt he should not batter down. It is because of this that there arises everywhere, as we were able to prove, in the human soul the torment of God to which God makes answer by revealing to man deliverance and peace.

But if God can not save man without man, he remains free to take the initiative in the matters of grace which will assure the realization of his de-

signs. If he reveals himself to a man or to a people, it is not in order that this man or this people may in their egotism enjoy the grace which he accords them; rather, it is a responsibility with which he is charging them, a call he is addressing to them. What he reveals to a man he expects the latter to incarnate in his life and in an activity which becomes by very virtue of the laws of spiritual dynamic an act of revelation which leads other men and peoples in their turn to seek and find the God who wills to reveal himself to them.

And furthermore, whenever man has opened his mind and soul to the clear light of the divine revelations, the religious history of humanity takes on a meaning which manifests the universality of the divine action in humanity. It is essentially a human drama which unfolds before our eyes, but a drama in which the action of God is incessantly engaged, awaking in humanity at all times and in all places the sense of a necessary deliverance and the desire of going forth to meet it. Doubtlessly it was because God found in the soul of the ancestors of Israel a response to his solicitations which he did not meet with elsewhere that he introduced his redemptive work into the history of a people whom he made—at what cost and struggle!—the people of revelation. But at the same time he inspired all mankind “to grope for him,” to use Paul’s phrase; he caused

the first glimmerings of revelation to penetrate perceptions darkened by sin, thus preventing the heathen world from sinking into sheer bestiality. To some noble spirits of antiquity he communicated the presentiment, at times even the vision, of eternal realities; in others he developed the feeling for a pure and noble moral life. Wherever sin and suffering and death reigned—wherever they now reign—that is, wherever men live—he always aroused, and does today, in them the need of deliverance, of consolation, of immortality which, like a goad, drives them, despite the dreadful slavery to which too often they resign themselves, beyond their actual wretchedness, beyond the world *which passes away*, to seek the ultimate reason and the supreme end of their life. And, through what is called natural religion and through the heathen religions, as well as through what is properly called his revelation, God is preparing humanity to know him perfectly and to know itself perfectly in Jesus Christ.

"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down,"¹⁹ prayed a prophet of Israel, giving expression to the torment of the human soul in quest of a full knowledge and possession of God.

To this prayer of men, "when the fulness of the time came," God made answer through the Gospel.

¹⁹ Isaiah 64:1.

With Christ the revelation culminates in the incarnation. What we have been able to grasp today of the divine revelations is but small beside what remains for us to know through Jesus Christ. The God of the Gospel—he is the God whom man, whom humanity needs. Ah, may he reveal to us his holiness, his truth, his beauty, and his unspeakable love!

VI

The God of the Gospel

"WE KNOW GOD ONLY BY JESUS CHRIST." THIS word of Pascal¹ comes to my mind when I desire to attempt to give you the vision of the God of the Gospel—of all tasks the most difficult. Not that I disregard or even minimize the knowledge of God, the rudiments of which the heathen religions lisped or to which human reason was able to attain, deploying, as the saying goes, all its forces, and, with greater reason, the knowledge which God has given of himself apart from Jesus Christ. But when above the less crude gods of heathenism, the God of Reason, and even the God of the prophets and upright men of Israel, there is unveiled before our eyes the splendor of the God of the Gospel, we are seized by the feeling that we are in the presence of that which is Unique, a feeling somewhat akin—but how much more moving!—to that which we experience, when, for example, from the shores of Lake Geneva, our horizon having been limited until then to the first peaks of the Alps of Savoie, we discover suddenly

¹ *Thoughts*, § 547.

through dissolving haze in its dazzling whiteness, afar off yet so near, the summit of Mont Blanc.

Let us endeavor, then, this evening to open our minds and souls to the knowledge of God which Jesus Christ offers us.

I

Jesus Christ makes God known to us, first of all, by his teaching. The God of the Gospel is the God of whom Christ speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, in his parables, in so many of his sayings which illumine this or that aspect of the ineffable One of whom he himself said, "No one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him."²

Does the teaching of Christ bring us into the presence of a God totally different from that of the prophets of Israel? Quite the contrary. The God of the Gospel is the God whom Jesus of Nazareth knew and loved and served from the earliest days of his childhood, when at the paternal hearth or in the synagogue he learned to read the books of Israel and engraved in his memory the principal precepts of the law of Moses, beautiful Psalms, and so many passages of the prophets, of which the Gospel contains the living essence.

The God of the Gospel is the God who revealed

² Matthew 11:27.

himself to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to the prophets, and to all those whose faith was for Jesus' work a source of inspiration.

Christ joined his teaching most intimately to the religious tradition of his people. For him, as for the prophets, God is Creator and also Providence; he is the God of justice and of holiness, the God of the law who condemns the sin but the God who wills to save the sinner, who pardons men who repent, who hears prayer and grants it, who calls man to know himself and to wish himself his child, and whose Kingdom will be made up one day of those who will accept his Law.

All this, gentlemen, we have already learned to see in the revelation which God gave of himself before the advent of Jesus Christ, and all this is met with again in the Gospel, but developed, perfected, purified, and ordained about the central affirmation of the fatherhood of God—the God of the Gospel is above all Father.

To be sure, in the Old Testament we can find here and there magnificent anticipations of the divine fatherhood. "Like as a father pitieth his children," a psalmist had exclaimed, "so the Eternal pitieth them that fear him."³ And the great anonymous prophet of the exile had called upon God

³ Psalm 103:13.

saying, "Yet thou, O Eternal, art our Father . . ."⁴ Furthermore, Jehovah appears as the father of the people or of the king.⁵ I know also that in the older paganism, as, for example, in Homer, the supreme God appears as the father of men and of the gods. But in the Gospel the fatherhood of God is no longer an attribute among other attributes; it is the fundamental character of the divine personality and reveals no longer God's attitude toward a people or an aggregation of men, whatever form it may take, but his essential style of behavior toward man.

God is Father—yours and mine—and this affirmation, which is at the very heart of the teaching of Jesus Christ, shines through the entire Gospel and reveals in an entirely new light the relation of God to the beings whom he quickened into life and at the same time the relation of these beings to the God who calls them to life.

Is God the Father of one people? of the Jews? No, of all men. The universal fatherhood of God marks the universality of divine love, which leaves far behind the Jewish conception of a national God to whom his people belong but who belongs to his people, which leaves far behind also the fairest and most universal insight of the prophets glimpsing the fact that one day the nations in a throng "will go

⁴ Isaiah 63:16.

⁵ Exodus 4:22; II Samuel 7:14.

up to the mountain of the Eternal,"⁶ but that now his right and spiritual supremacy belong to the chosen people, the people of the revelation. There is, in this universality of the divine fatherhood a universality of generosity which Christ illumined in the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."⁷

To this universality of the divine fatherhood corresponds the universality of human brotherhood. If God is the Father of all, all men are brothers. And it is here that the originality of the new law proclaimed by the Gospel appears, a law of which it can be said that it is a *double-headed* law. Undoubtedly the commandment of love to God and the commandment of love to the neighbor had been already given before Jesus Christ. But Jesus takes them, unites them, joins them indissolubly one to the other, and renders them one solid whole. And he did it in such a way that ever since his teaching it has been impossible to love God without feeling at the same instant the urge to love and serve one's brothers; and it has been impossible to love men with a genuine and effectual love without loving them as God sees them and wills them to be, that is, as men called to be sons of God.

⁶ Isaiah 2.

⁷ Matthew 5:45.

But it is necessary to go beyond generalities. The love of God, in the teaching of Jesus, is neither an abstraction nor a concept. If the love of God is for all, it is for each individual. The universal love has an especial genius for the particular. It addresses itself not to humanity in general nor to the ideal or *abstract* man, but to man in his individual existence. The God of the Gospel is the God of *concrete* man. The God of Jesus Christ interests himself in the individual to a degree which we cannot imagine. The infinite worth in the eyes of God of the human person, of every human person, is the great revelation of the Gospel. The human soul is of greater value than the whole world. Hence these essential qualities of the divine love which blaze with such magnificence in the teaching of Jesus Christ, and in particular in some of his parables—the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son—indefatigable perseverance, patience proof against everything, absolute generosity. Such is the love which God feels for man who, let us not forget, is a sinner.

And this man, gentlemen, God calls through Jesus Christ to resemble him. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."⁸

Good news, great news indeed! News of deliver-

⁸ Luke 6:36; Matthew 5:48.

ance, of salvation which, going beyond the narrow confines of earthly existence, reëchoes in the Invisible. The God whose love bestows an eternal value upon every human soul is not, according to the word of Christ, the God of the dead; he is the God of the living.⁹

Ah, I know full well that the Gospel has incurred the anger and hatred of all those who wish to maintain among men an immutable hierarchy by virtue of which there will always be men in high positions who command and those in low who obey, for Christ, taking his stand in the midst of mankind whom he calls to become a humanity of brothers, sees in this slave dust sons whose return God is awaiting; in this clamorous multitude of creatures of a day who are being carried on to death, he teaches us to recognize the heirs of eternal life.

II

Such, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ, is the God of the Gospel. But this God does not reveal himself simply through what Christ said; he reveals himself still more in what Christ was and did.

Men have claimed many times to have discovered many sources for the teaching of Jesus. Without mentioning the Holy Scriptures of his people in

⁹ Matthew 22:32.

which it is easy to recognize many of his words, more or less superficial contacts have been shown between others and the precepts of Confucius or the sages of the East who, many centuries before his advent, had illumined human consciousness and thought with glorious gleams of light.

Such investigations, gentlemen, are not without interest. Nevertheless, they remain on the surface of things. For what is unique in the Gospel, the thing whereby it is different from every other collection of moral maxims, however beautiful they may be, is the fact that the teaching of Christ cannot be detached from his person. What Jesus taught, he did; he says what he is. "Never man spake like this man," said the officers of the temple one day who had been charged to seize him. And you know what an impression of authority his word produced on all those who hearkened to him. Whence, then, came this authority, save precisely from the fact that the word of Christ was a living word? It was a living word because it was a lived word.

He who was of all men sweet and humble of heart nevertheless does not hesitate, as you know, to put his own person in the foreground. Why? Is it not because he has the profound conviction that those who come to him to receive the teaching which he gives them from God will learn to know God far more by living in intimacy with the One

who reveals him than by hearing him talk about him?

Indeed, Jesus did not confine himself to giving in the Beatitudes the clear light of the new humanity; he lived the Beatitudes. When we attempt to discover through the Gospels something of the moral figure of Christ, we can attain this end in no better way than by seeking in the Beatitudes the manifold and different aspects of a character whose incomparable harmony they set forth.

Jesus did not confine himself to affirming the holiness of God; he was holy. Oh, I know that just as man asks us to prove God, they demand that we prove the holiness of Jesus Christ. This holiness does not *prove* itself, gentlemen; it *attests* itself to the conscience which takes its start and maintains itself in the radiance of the very conscience of Jesus. Whoever approaches it with a right heart and strives, in spite of the mystery which envelops it, to plumb its depths, to him the conscience of Jesus appears as "a conscience without a scar"; and his holiness becomes for the one who experiences its sanctifying virtue an unshakable inner certainty. The witness of Christ, furthermore, confirms this certainty. Never, indeed, in any of his words do you detect in his conscience a feeling of regret occasioned by a wrong deed, the avowal of a moral deficiency, the

personal experience of sin, or the experience of pardon sought and gained for himself.

Finally, Jesus did not believe that it was sufficient to proclaim in his teaching that God loves men; he loved them, and you know without my stressing it now with what a love!

Thus the revelation which God gives of himself culminates not in the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, but in his person. We have already said, Man is the one who reveals God here on earth. Sinful man can be but an imperfect revealer of him. The Son of man, the one whom the apostle Paul hailed with the title, new Adam, the man whose willing obedience at last answers the expectation of God, is the perfect revealer because he is the perfect revelation. In his presence, in the presence of the revelation which he brings, one saying and one saying alone could translate and will ever translate the decisive certainty which this revelation communicates to the man who receives it and knows that it is the truth of God—"The Word became flesh."¹⁰

"What is God?" a man asks. And the Gospel answers this question by showing him a man, "a man of gracious and kindly disposition, touched with compassion at the sight of our wretchedness, who weeps with those who weep, who suffers the children to come to him and the sick and the sinful,

¹⁰ John 1:14.

who has blessings and help and revelations for all, consolations for all, who in his love sacrifices himself for all. By contemplating this man, man recognizes his God, in whose likeness he has been created, and all his divine instincts are awakened."¹¹

Clement of Alexandria, one of the most illustrious of the Church Fathers, once said, "God became man in order that you might learn from a man how man can become God." And an even shorter word, struck as a medal, Christ himself uttered: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."¹²

But what Jesus was he expressed in what he did. The revelatory work of God was incarnated in the work of Christ. Let us attempt to see within this work.

To what does it lead? You know the answer—salvation. "The Son of man," said Jesus, "came to seek and to save that which was lost."¹³ Is it a question of the salvation of a people, the salvation of men, by political and social reforms? No, gentlemen, this conception of salvation and the temptation to work by this way and method for the salvation of humanity and above all for the salvation of his people Jesus Christ cast aside, and here lies the profound significance of its temptation. What he wills

¹¹ Christophe Dieterlen, *La Religion de la Bible*, p. 52.

¹² John 14:9.

¹³ Luke 19:10.

and seeks for is the salvation of mankind by the salvation of the individual man, and the salvation of the man by his return to God, a return which will be brought about not by holy works, however religious they may be, but simply by faith—"Have faith in God."¹⁴

And by contact with Christ faith is awakened in the soul. His work, which leads to salvation, and to salvation alone, makes use of but one means—love. Disinterested love which gives itself in complete forgetfulness of self and is entirely concerned with those whom he loves; love which never draws back from the obstacles which sin unceasingly and ever afresh opposes to it; clear-sighted love which seeks to find deep within man the divine germ choked by sin; love which ever believes it possible to awaken in the heart of man the sense of his sonship with God, with the result that, having believed—perhaps without seeing in it anything other than a generality—that God is the Father of all men, he becomes aware in the depths of his being of the unique tie which unites him to the one who is the source of his life, whom he now knows as *his* Father and whose son he realizes that he himself is. Christ expresses this love by a word, a gesture, at times by a simple look, but it is no less a work to which he

¹⁴ Mark 11:22.

gives himself completely, because it leads to far more than the making acceptable certain beliefs or the obtaining superficial reforms from man, and because it aims at freeing the human conscience from all the servitude which presses heavy on it. The love of Christ, gentlemen, is the work of salvation, of redemption in which are incarnated all the holy ambitions of the living God.

The work of redemption, as you know, implies suffering.

We have already seen, while speaking of the revelation which God gave of himself and of man, of the state of wretchedness to which sin reduced man and of the divine call to which the man was called despite his misery and sin, that one remedy alone is possible for sin—suffering.

Suffering appears in the life of Jesus well before what the Church calls the Passion. Perhaps, even before commencing his ministry Christ had had a revelation of his suffering when, reading and meditating upon the page which is of all in our Bible the most moving, the fifty-third chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah, he caught a glimpse on the horizon of his own life of the vision of a servant of the Eternal suffering for the sins of men, desiring to be one with the sinners, offering himself to endure in their stead the consequences of their wretch-

edness and defilement, and giving his life in suffering to bring to them the deliverance and peace of God.

In his *Life of Jesus* Renan tells us of a Galilean idyll during which Jesus would have done nothing save pluck the fragrant flowers of the love and enthusiasm and recognition of his people. Do we not understand that even in this period, which is illumined by such great hopes and is attended by the songs of gladness of the multitude whose wretchedness Jesus assuages, whose hunger he relieves, and whose sicknesses he cures, suffering was already present—and of what severity!—the suffering of the pure and holy man who with clear vision penetrates the heart of his brethren to the very bottom cursed with sin; the suffering of him who, knowing the infinite worth of the man who has fallen deepest through his wretchedness and sin, knowing that this man is a son of God, sees him resist the appeals of the divine love and love the cursed bondage which his pride calls freedom?

The further Christ advances in his ministry, the more intense his suffering becomes. To the growing opposition of his enemies and the ingratitude of the rabble is added the sad lack of understanding of his disciples. And then Gethsemane and the walk to Calvary. Finally the Cross!

The Cross proclaims the love of a God who hates

sin with all the might of his holiness, but who none the less persists in loving men with all the might of his love; who suffers from man's sin but who hopes that the man will some day answer his love, and who does not hesitate, in order to persuade the sinner to believe in this love, to suffer all the suffering of his son. The God who reveals the Cross of Golgotha is a God who does not shrink back from the suffering necessary to restore to an upright state the human conscience, enslaved and overclouded by sin, by convincing it at once of the tragic awfulness of sin and of the sovereignty of the love and pardon of God.

Yes, of a truth, before the Cross of Jesus we can only repeat the word of the apostle Paul, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."¹⁵

There, indeed, lies the perfect revelation which God willed to give of himself, as it appears in the light of Easter. The redemption perfects the incarnation, as the incarnation alone gave meaning to the creation.

But here, you detect, there arises a new problem. Who then was Christ, to be able to be the perfect revealer, the perfect revelation of God? Who, then, was he, that with a St. John or a St. Paul Christians of all centuries repeat "God was in Christ"? A mighty problem this, and one which we can but

¹⁵ II Corinthians 5:19.

state today and which will of necessity be the subject of a new series of studies.

III

You will recall, gentlemen, the word of a contemporary writer which I gave as the title for our meetings this year—"God is the eternal torment of man."

Can the God of the Gospel appease this torment? I am profoundly convinced that he can.

Observe first of all the points of harmony between the knowledge which God gives us of himself and of man and the solution to which we have been led by the examination of the problem of ourselves.

"The greatness and the wretchedness of man," said Pascal, "are so evident that the true religion must necessarily teach us both that there is in man some great source of greatness, and a great source of wretchedness. It must then give us a reason for these astounding contradictions."¹⁶

Indeed, the Gospel and the Gospel alone lays bare in their deepest roots these contradictions which find solution only in the acceptance of the emancipating message which the Gospel brings us. "If the son shall make you free," says the Gospel according to St. John, "ye shall be free indeed."¹⁷ And, indeed,

¹⁶ *Thoughts*, § 430 (beginning).

¹⁷ John 8:36.

from the first days of Christianity, when the first disciples of Jesus Christ form themselves into Churches planted in the very midst of the heathen world through the preaching of the Cross, what has characterized Christians is that they are free men. The yoke of moral servitude which weighed down on their conscience was shattered. These men arise in the midst of the ancient world as the prophets and pioneers of a race of free men; they possess the glorious freedom of the children of God. By the very conduct of their faith, giving access to the grace of God in their individual lives, they have grasped the solution of the problem of their life and destiny.

Observe, furthermore, that the Gospel alone permits us to take account of this experience of moral freedom, the reality of which imposes itself upon our conscience in the very midst of the most utter determinism of physical life.

“By the intimate experience of his liberty,” wrote Professor Jundt in a notable study, “man is aware that deep within his moral being he participates in a higher life, subject to other conditions than those of organic life. In this experience there are given to him at once the certainty of the reality of a higher life and the certainty of being called, by his freedom, to realize completely in himself this higher life. . . . Moral freedom gains meaning only in a world which is under the sway of the God of the

Gospel; we recognize in it the capacity with which God has endowed man for the purpose of allowing him to rise to divine sonship. . . . Inversely, the reality of freedom attests the truth of the Gospel. Life as a child of God exists potentially in every man, Christian or non-Christian, who obeys the voice of conscience. As a Christian, he realizes the destiny to which, as a man, God calls him."¹⁸

How can we fail to see at last that the God of the Gospel gives and alone can give to the God of metaphysics his complete meaning?

Doubtlessly there have been and will still continue to be types of metaphysics involving human thinking in a world of abstractions and concepts and, consequently, sweeping them on in a direction quite the reverse of that in which the Gospel teaches us to seek and know God. But recall, gentlemen, what I have just now had occasion to say of the metaphysics which certain French philosophers labored to set up during the nineteenth century. Recall the words of a Maine de Biran, a Ravaisson, a Lachelier, or a Boutroux, and you will understand these words of Lachelier, who says that if philosophy, reduced to only that which reason can accomplish, does not permit man to grasp the real and living God, "may faith run the risk of doing it."¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ce que je sais de Dieu*, p. 113.

¹⁹ *Notes sur le pari de Pascal*.

But through having thus effected by an act of faith the transfer from the idea of God to God, from the God of reason to the God of religion, does not man pass from the natural to the supernatural? Yes, indeed. Yet let us not forget that the "supernatural does not proceed from the natural . . . the chasm which separates them is such that man is unable to leap across without the special concourse of God; but with God all things are possible, and his grace blowing and opening in the natural transforms it, perfects it, and sanctifies it from within," that as a consequence this discontinuity which so impresses us between the God whom our reason can attain to and the God who offers himself to us in the Gospel is transformed, not by the efforts of human thought, but by the free gift of God alone, into a supernatural continuity which manifests in the adorable presence of God within us the ineffable reality of God outside us.²⁰

Furthermore, the witness of history is at hand to show us that the God of the Gospel is truly the one who answers man's unrest and appeases his torment.

Ah, well do I know that repeatedly even he has been deformed and maimed and travestied by even those who pretended to be his representatives here

²⁰ J. Chevalier, *Trois Conférences d'Oxford*, p. 40.

on earth. There is always the temptation to prove or to show God as a *thing* which presents itself to us from without and which imposes its reality upon us. And too often the Church in the person of its doctors has yielded to this temptation.

But what agonies of unrest have been calmed, what torments appeased! The history of the Church, the history of Missions in heathen lands, of the evangelization of our great cities, if they could here give their testimony, would cause us to hear the countless echoes of a splendid harmony, the harmony of all those souls who for nineteen centuries, having found God through Christ, have lived in him and for him.

From the day when the apostle Paul in his words to the Christians of Philippi assured them that henceforth the peace of God would guard their hearts when formerly the suffering of sin and the anguish of an unknown destiny held sway, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has not ceased to bring men into the presence of the God whom it reveals and to enable them to find in him the secret of intellectual and spiritual peace.

Hearken to the words of St. Augustine: "God did not withdraw from that which he created. All that comes from him subsists in him. See where he is, even wherever is a flavor of truth, in the very

heart. . . . Stand with him, and ye shall stand; rest yourselves in him, and ye shall rest."²¹

And close at hand we receive once more the testimony of a contemporary writer whose voice, often so profound in tone, we have repeatedly heard—Jacques Rivière. After his conversion he wrote: "Since I have been restored to faith I have sensed so many things simplified for me, so many knots become loosed, so many faculties within me regain their natural use! I can no longer look upon my conversion as an heroic or extreme step, as Pascal conceived, but as the tardy coming of a solution."²²

Truly a magnificent harmony of souls who have found the God of the Gospel! Poor souls tossed about on an ever-moving ocean of uncertainties or passions, souls doting on themselves and yet unconscious of their divine worth, souls tormented by the thirst for the unknown God who will bring to them at last deliverance and peace! One day they met Christ; through him, in him, they gained the revelation of the God who gives himself to them to aid them to give themselves to him, and in humbleness they accepted the royal gift of redemptive love. Doubtlessly, as a result of possessing God to a limited degree they feel the thirst to possess him

²¹ *Confessions* iv, 12.

²² Letter to André Gide, January 4, 1913 (*Nouvelle Revue Française*, April, 1925, p. 776).

even more mounting in them. It is a profound aspiration which runs afoul of the limitation of space and time, and still more of the imperfections of obedience and love and thus becomes this torment of God which we have noted in believers: "I give myself and am received," said Rivière once more, "and I sense that by giving myself still more I shall be received infinitely more."²³ But how are we to give ourselves completely in a world which ever seeks to regain what we take from it to give to God? This very torment, which stirs in their souls a more ardent quest and a more complete offering, refines in them the sense of the invisible. Then in their intimacy with the God of the Gospel there occurs the birth to the world of eternal realities. This is not, as some could believe, the absorption of a soul in a God who is eternal substance in whom everything is called to merge and lose its own identity. No, it is a reciprocal gift due to the meeting of wills which are seeking and find themselves. "At the same time that the soul has nothing which it does not acquire it no longer has nothing which it does not receive. And what is more, it acquires only through giving self, since to acquire is, for it, to become like to God so as to be united with him. . . . It ought to live for others and for more than self, not *for self alone*, because by no manner of means does it live *by self*

²³ *A la trace de Dieu*, October 27, 1924.

alone. Were it not master of itself, it would not be able to give itself. But if it did not give itself, it would not become what it should be."²⁴

So then the Christian soul, apprehending itself in the eternal source of its being, knows itself loved from eternity and for eternity. That the world here below is imperfect is of little consequence to it; well does it know that it is but a way station and that earthly existence is but one stage, though a necessary one. It knows that it is on the road to perfection.

"When that which is perfect is come," said the apostle Paul, "that which is in part shall be done away."²⁵ And the Christian soul, looking beyond the visible things and from the very imperfection to which it submits on earth, hailing the perfection which it will one day know, repeats with St. John: "We shall be like him, for we shall see him even as he is."²⁶

Do not you find here, believers, your hope and indeed your certainty? Do not you find here, even in the midst of the difficulties and trials of life, the source of your peace?

Ah, well do I understand that at certain hours you feel the temptation to flee far from the turmoil of the world in order to be absorbed in contemplation

²⁴ Laberthonnière, *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, 1925, p. 73.

²⁵ I Corinthians 13:10.

²⁶ I John 3:2.

of the God to whom Jesus Christ leads you. But this would be to forsake the call which the God of the Gospel extends to you.

Doubtlessly, that your piety may continue and increase you ought to nourish it with study and with prayer.²⁷ Nevertheless, even while you are indefatigably pursuing the necessary task of deepening your religious life and of laying hold through thought of the fundamental affirmations of faith, do not forget that there are men to whom you are under obligation, men in whose midst you are called to live the life of God, his life of holiness, his life of love and of generosity, not for the purpose of imposing your deepest conviction upon them from without in some way or other, but to arouse them in their turn to the spiritual life which has become your life's greatest treasure.

But to you, my brother unbelievers, who perhaps are present in this congregation, have I been able to show that the God of the Gospel is the one who appeases the torment which you sometimes experience?

This torment reveals to you that God is seeking you to restore you to yourselves by bringing you to himself and to persuade you to give a meaning and direction to your life that it may acquire an eternal value.

²⁷ Cf. J. Maritan, *Dialogues*, p. 62.

God is the eternal torment of man. Yes indeed, because he does not resign himself to abandon men to their fall and their sin, because he insists on offering "his outstretched hand which pride refuses to grasp,"²⁸ and because he wills, though it were at the cost of the bitterest suffering, to bring men to seek him as seek those who wish to find.

Meanwhile, gentlemen, do not forget that God is found only by the ways taught in the Gospel, as Pascal reminds us. You will never find him if you consider yourselves on an equal footing with truth, if you refuse to renounce yourselves, pride in your own reason, and the worship of self.

"God resisteth the proud," says the Scriptures, "but giveth grace to the humble."²⁹ Christian experience throughout the centuries confirms the truth of this apostolic utterance. But well do I know that if there are some among you who, having experienced, perhaps for a long while, the torment of God and having felt deep in their conscience the goad of God who drives them on to seek to find him, decide to enter and tread the path of faith in God which always leads through Jesus Christ, one day they will hear resound to the depths of their conscience, as have so many others, the words of the perfect revealer of God: "Thy faith hath saved thee;

²⁸ André Gide, *Numquid et tu* . . ., p. 72.

²⁹ I Peter 5:5.

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go in peace"—"Let not your heart be troubled, my peace I give unto you."³⁰

The hour has come, gentlemen, for us to part until the day when, please God, we shall be able to undertake together a new study.

Well do I realize I am not parting from visible hearers alone whose kindly attention has constantly sustained me in my task, I am parting also from the entire invisible audience, thought of which moves me deeply.³¹

Whoever you may be, my invisible brothers, near or far, known or unknown, Catholic or Protestant, Jews or freethinkers, allow me to express to you my ardent hope that the shadows which perhaps still veil from your eyes the splendor of the God of Jesus Christ will one day be swept away and that having finally accepted *the only solution of the only problem*, we shall all have communion forever in faith in the God who bids us love him and love one another in him.

And the prayer which at the close of this Holy Week I offer to him for you is that in the meditation of the Cross you may learn the better what you are, what God wills to be for you, what you can become for him and for your brethren. Then on Easter

³⁰ Luke 7:50; John 14:27.

³¹ The lectures contained in this volume were broadcasted by *Radio-Paris*.

morning in the joy and gladness of life triumphant it will be revealed to you that you too are called to pass through death, death to yourselves, your egotism, and your pride, but to pass through death in order to lay hold of life which, beginning on this earth, because it is the life of God bears within it the certainty of eternity.

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